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# MISTERTON

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# MISTERTON;

OR,

*THROUGH SHADOW TO SUNLIGHT.*

BY

UNUS.

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W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13, WATERLOO PLACE, S.W.
1882.

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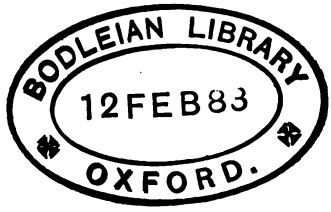


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# MISTERTON.

## CHAPTER I.

### RETROSPECTIVE.

A FINE old place was the Rectory, lichened and ivy-covered, touched with loving hand by time—that beautiful destroyer. The long walks seemed to wander as they would over hill and vale, and the shady bowers seemed to form themselves so invitingly that the moss-grown seats were forced to appear and inhabit them as if at the touch of some fairy enchantress. And what enchantress could well be fairer than she who now paced the fair greensward that faced the bow windows? Truly, upon Lilian Beachwood had Nature showered her fairest gifts; dark hair of chestnut brown, blue-grey eyes with delicately-pencilled brows, Grecian nose, small lips, but full, decided chin; the face of Venus with the form of Diana, large and yet shapely, with ankle and instep of truest outline.

And yet as she and her mother—for who can doubt the relationship? Lilian is truly her mother's daughter—pace the grass, a cloud seems to be sett[illegible] uncalled on the fair face.

"Well, Lilian, what do you intend to wear to-night?"

"Oh! mother, must we go?"

"Go! of course you must; we must: we have accepted Sir Lionel's very kind invitation."

"Oh! but mother," pleadingly, "you know you are sometimes not well enough to go out, and—and —couldn't you be not quite well to-night?"

The voice was clear—clearer still, perhaps, from its very softness. There was something, too, of nobility about it, as who has not noticed character declaring itself through the lips?

"Why, Lily, you seem strangely reluctant to go, and yet you are usually pretty ready for a change. You are not ill, my dear?"

"Oh! no, mother, not at all; but—but—I hardly know how to express it; I feel that our going out will not turn out well."

"Not turn out well! why not? I cannot see how a dinner-party can turn out well or ill."

"Well, mother mine, I fancy something will happen to-night you won't like; and you know, sweet mother, I would not do anything to grieve you for the world!"

"But what can happen to grieve me?"

"Well, mother, if you will have it, Sir Lionel—I hardly know how to express it—but—but—he has been very kind to me of late; and the other night, at the Flood's ball, he danced with me three times, and wanted a fourth."

"Well, my dear, there is nothing very alarming in that, is there?"

"Oh! but, mother, suppose he were to take advan-

tage to-night, and to ask me! Oh! mother, I could never be Sir Lionel's wife."

What more would have been said on either side will never be known, for at this moment a servant crossed the lawn with a message,—"Old Giles, the clerk, had fallen and hurt himself; would Mrs. Beachwood go down and see him?"

The kind motherly soul started off at once, and Lilian was left to pursue her train of thought alone. She was barely twenty; her whole life had been spent amongst those trees; from the branches of that oak had been hung her swing; beneath that weeping willow she had had her childish treats of strawberries and cream; the grand old church hard by seemed to have sheltered and protected her with its silent loving tenderness all her life—her life which seemed barely begun. And yet with all this beauty and happiness, this loving care and sweet companionship, a shade is across Lilian's forehead, and care, harsh-browed, sits on Lilian's face. For now, first of all, she is brought face to face with the realities of womanhood, and it has not come to her as she would have had it come; nay, as she has painted it coming in the dreamy evening time. It is the month of May—that month which seems to combine so much, and to present itself to us in so many varieties that it almost appears to embody within itself something—some characteristic—of all other months. Now it comes to us in the early morning with the white brilliance and hard crispness of frost, reminding us of the sharp touch of winter; anon it is dust-covered and wind-blown, with a breeze that has a full March flavour. And again, as now, it assumes a

summer warmth and mellowness of tint and colour equal to the months which tread upon its heels. Lilian paces up and down some half-hour longer; then the luncheon bell rings; her father comes out in the silvery reverence of age, wearing the black coat which betokens the cleric, but with high collar and carefully-folded and tied white lawn neckerchief which belong to an old school of the clergy which has almost disappeared, along with its outward adorning. They go in arm-in-arm into the dining-room through the French window.

We will take the opportunity of a chat about them in their absence. I wish you could have seen them enter together, and you would have been fain to confess that nowhere throughout the broad shires of England could truer, nobler specimens be found of youth and age. The Reverend Llewellyn Beachwood was no ordinary rector, and Misterton was no ordinary rectory. The Rector—or as every one loved to call him who could lay the least claim to the possession, "Our Rector"—came of an old stock. For generations the Beachwoods had represented Glebeshire in Parliament; they had married representatives of nearly all the families of the country side, and had often foray'ed across the border, sometimes far into the Welsh highlands, and brought themselves wives of the best Welsh blood.

Thus, though they owned no charter of nobility, and said—as most old families do say that have not got one—that they would not take it if it were offered them, "plain esquire reaching back into the ages being much the more honourable title"—still

they held their heads amongst the highest when Llewellyn of that stock appeared in the world. He was the fourth and last olive-branch which sprang of the union of Philip Beachwood, Esquire, of Beachwood Copse, and Emily his wife. His eldest brother, Philip, was brought up to the management of an estate and a seat in Parliament, not, one would think, a difficult or impossible destiny; his second brother, Reginald, for the army, of course to be a General—the Beachwoods always looked high; his sister Emily to be married; that is, she was duly instructed in all domestic arts, received directions how and when to choose the partner of her maturer years, with hints not to be too demonstrative—that was left to the lower orders; Llewellyn was destined for the Church. The last was the only successful part of the family scheme. Philip Beachwood suffered the estate, never too large, to manage itself; he only found out his mistake when he had passed across the Channel, and it had passed into other hands. Reginald died a lieutenant. Emily lived and died an old maid; whether this was due to the accident of circumstance or to a too strict observance of her mother's directions, or to the fact that she had a decided squint, I have never been able to ascertain.

Llewellyn went to Harrow, and thence to Oxford; took respectable honours, led a quiet, studious life as a curate in the county town of Whitwell for six years, preached his own sermons, and left the fact to publish itself. After six years he was appointed Rector of Misterton by an old friend and a house; not so much, perhaps, because of

above facts as because he was a Beachwood of Beachwood Copse. It was a fine Rectory, worth nearly £1,000 a year, and from that Rectory he had not moved, although thirty years had elapsed at the time my story opens. His wife Mary came of an old stock, but had brought little to help to line the family nest, except some rather remote expectations, which, like most expectations, might or might not be realized. Two children had resulted from the marriage, a boy and a girl; the boy was named Reginald after the dead uncle, who had been rather a scamp, and whom, therefore, as is the way with scamps in the family circle, his brother had of course loved much. The girl had come when the lilies of the valley were flowering, and they had called her Lilian, and verily somewhat of their purity and sweetness and chaste beauty seemed to have attached itself to her. The quiet of the Rectory and its inmates remained unchanged until Reginald, or "Reg," as he had always been called, went to a public school in the Midlands; the Beachwoods were all public school men, and looked upon private tutors as nurses for idiots and milksops. The Beachwoods never belonged to either category. He had been at school two years; had secured the love of his fellows by making them respect him first—school being in this respect, as in most others, a small world, very like the large one outside—when a sad blow happened to the little circle at the Rectory. It all came about one afternoon. The boys were enjoying their Wednesday afternoon holiday, and were spending it—most of them at any rate—in the cricket-field. It was hot June weather—too hot for anything older folks would

probably have said ; but boys aver that it can never be too hot for cricket. Reg Beachwood had just been having batting practice at the net, several of the other boys bowling to him ; his turn was out, another had taken his wicket, and had assumed the batsman's place. Reg stood watching for a few seconds at the corner of the net, dangling his batting gloves in his hands, with the "pads" still on his legs. The boy batting had never been known to hit a "leg ball" in his life, and, besides, boys never know fear. However, he hit one then, straight round ; straight through the two or three yards that intervened between himself and Reg Beachwood, straight to Reg Beachwood's temple. All was over that night. Death is always sad ; but death in life, death in youth, death with the ruddy glow of health on the cheek, and with the nervous strength still quivering through the limbs, that is the saddest, most awful, most awe-inspiring death of all ; that death poor generous, noble, brave Reg Beachwood died that night. One boy never saw a cricket-ball again without a shudder, and never again raised a bat on his shoulder. To one home in its brightness and beauty, to its joy and peace, came news which furrowed a loving mother's cheek ; how much mothers love their boys ! It becomes almost adoration when they are such boys as was Reginald Beachwood.

The child Lilian wept many tears when she knew her playmate and companion was to come home in life no more. But on the father's heart, and the father's head, and the father's whole frame there settled a greyness which in this life never would

wholly pass away. It is ten years since then. Lilian from a child has become a woman, but still she often sits when the sun is out, in the hot summer time, by that little grave in the churchyard at Misterton, which bears the simple inscription on its headstone:—

"To the memory of Reginald Beachwood, the muchly-loved son of the Rector of Misterton and of Mary his wife." Following this were those two dates which often are the most important, and only worth recording in our uneventful lives, that of his birth and of his death, and then these words of simple, loving, hopeful, trusting faith,—

"I shall go to him; but he shall not return to me."

## CHAPTER II.

### AT SIR LIONEL'S DINNER.

"LION, isn't your tie rather crumpled?"

"Yes, mother; this is the fourth I have tried on to-night, and I have tied and untied this one five times; each attempt only proving more abortive than the last."

"God help my boy!" is the mother's ejaculatory but silent prayer as they descend the stairs together from Sir Lionel's dressing-room. He had been her boy for very nearly forty years; but it is hard for mothers to understand their children's ages, unless long absence teaches them the lesson. All the love of Lady Florence Battersby was centred in this one son. It was, however, not a selfish love. She knew young men ought to marry, especially those who are heirs to large estates and an honourable name. She wished Lionel to marry a wife worthy of him, and she had long set herself to find him a help-meet—she would herself choose for him. Wealth was no object. The Misterton Grange estate was encumbered by no mortgages, and required no outlying farms, belonging to some one else, to make up the symmetry of its ring fence. No; the lady must be a lady, in all that the word comprises; it is, unfortunately, getting to comprise less day by day; and she became *ipso facto* an

eligible candidate. Unfortunately, Lady Florence became conscious of the intense realism of the proverb, which declares, "That though one man may bring a horse to the water, ten cannot make him drink." All Lady Florence's ingenuity—and she was not deficient in this all-important requisite—could only bring the ladies to Sir Lionel, and—much the more difficult task of the two—Sir Lionel to the ladies. When they were there, she could neither marry them to him, nor him to them. They might be dark and they might be fair; they might be coy and they might be self-reliant (I do not like strong language); they might be accomplished, or they might be sound. Sir Lionel would not marry any of them at any price. Thirty-nine years had passed over his head, and society had already appointed an heir presumptive, and still Sir Lionel loved his "short horns" best; when suddenly an important discovery thrust itself upon him—how, when, and where, I am unable to chronicle—which altered the whole current of his thoughts, and gave his life a shock it had never experienced before. What Sir Lionel Battersby's discovery was my fair readers, with that discriminating judgment in such matters which characterizes the gentler sex, will have already opined. It was, in brief, that his Rector's daughter Lilian had ceased to be a child, and had become a woman. It is often said that a man makes love more sensibly after he has passed his first youth, that he goes about it more stolidly, and sees his chances more truly than his younger *confrères*.

I am inclined to doubt this statement. It was, at any rate, not the case with Sir Lionel. He could

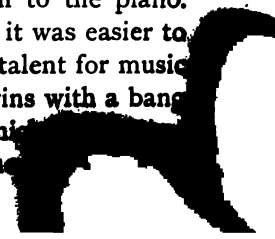
not keep away from Lilian. Where she went he went. He danced with her, and, foolishly, with no one else, except by his mother's express orders. He had always been a steady church-goer; his father had appointed Mr. Beachwood; he was now the patron of the living; but hitherto once a day had sufficed on Sundays, and on the week-days he only appeared twice a year—at Christmas and on Good Friday.

Now, if there had been three services on the Sunday he would have been at them all; and every Wednesday evening—those were quiet times when one week-day service was rather advanced in the country—saw him in his place. His mother saw the thing at once; so, unfortunately, did the whole neighbourhood. Sir Lionel was the best abused man in the county. Only one person failed to see it, and that was the Rector of Misterton himself. He had come to the conclusion that Sir Lionel must have become an awakened man; so he was, but not quite in the way the Rector meant. One good resulted from all this—the Rector preached more fervently than he had ever done before. He thought, poor man, he had found an additional spur; and as the neighbourhood was, theologically speaking, rather comatose, the unusual stimulus was quite startling in its effects. The Rector preached at Sir Lionel, and Sir Lionel looked at Lilian. Life is generally half tragedy, half comedy. Thus had matters progressed up to the night that Mrs. Beachwood and Lilian were to dine at Misterton Grange. They started about seven o'clock in an open pony carriage; Lilian, as was her wont, driving; her mother by her side; a groom behind. It was quite light, but had it not been so,

both Lilian and her pony knew every inch of the road. I am afraid they cast very little thought as they went —the humans I mean, not the pony—to the beauties of the scene; and very beautiful it was. The buzz of the insects only seemed to make the quiet of the evening deeper. Their way wound first through quiet country lanes, then at a gate, which was already opened for them, and which the groom closed behind them, they turned into the Beachwood Grange home estate. Nature at first worked her wildest will as she pleased; for quite a quarter of a mile a wood, with a large lake in the middle, stretched by their side, the water glinting and shining through the trees; then the road abruptly turned and skirted a hill. They were in view of the house; a foot walk up the hill-side would have reached it in five minutes. The carriage drive was here regular and smooth, and on either side closely-cropped turf, but very winding. Ten minutes more and they were at the house. They, the mother and daughter, had not exchanged a word throughout the drive; the presence of the groom within hearing precluded the one topic, and they were neither of them in the mood for small talk. They had hardly met since the morning, and had had no time to renew the conversation; perhaps neither desired it; certainly Lilian did not; and her mother felt that on this point her daughter knew her own mind. Seldom have two people entered a drawing-room with a greater desire to be anywhere else than did Mrs. Beachwood and Lilian that night.

It was a large room, with big open fireplace, two bow-windows, and a general appearance and feeling

of habitableness. Sir Lionel and his mother—at any other time I should have inverted the order—advanced to meet them. Apologies for the Rector, which were not unexpected—he rarely went out, or indeed, had done so since poor Reg's death—and then an awkward silence. Silence is very objectionable sometimes; this was, very; all four were glad when the butler announced dinner. Sir Lionel had earnestly set his face against any other guests being invited; he almost wished now that he had let his mother have her own way. The black-and-tan terrier on the hearthrug—a great pet with Lilian in days gone by, and, therefore, the constant companion of Sir Lionel now—knew just about as much as they did, whether the cook had constructed a series of *chef d'œuvres*, or whether she had produced a succession of signal failures. They four were playing a game at whist, in which one only held trumps. In an hour grace had been said and the servants had retired; wine had been courteously pressed and refused, and they all rose from the table together. Sir Lionel held the door open for his mother and her guests to pass through, and then followed. He had no wish for a *tête-à-tête* with himself now. That had been his occupation all day. No general before an engagement, upon which the fate of nations depended, had ever gone over the ground more carefully. Once in the drawing-room, Lilian sat down to the piano. I don't think any one asked her, but it was easier to play than to talk. She had a rare talent for music—real music—not the sort which begins with a bang and ends with a crash, but that which souls can create, which seems breath



created, and which speaks of itself clear, sweet word-notes to the soul; never without a message of its own, but that message always different, as each one needs differ, one from another. Music like this God gives to man. It is often the language of the spheres, expressed not in words—that were too exact and abrupt—but in cadence, that the human soul might learn a lesson of comfort and rest. That lesson came home to Lilian during that dreamy half-hour; then she rose up strong, pitiful, but determined to do that which every true woman finds the hardest task of her life, to say "No" to a good man, whom she respects and likes, but loves not, and yet who loves her well. God forgive those who are weak and say what they do not mean, and can never learn to mean at a time like this. Sir Lionel and Lilian passed out without a word of explanation or shadow of excuse through the hall and the smoking-room—a smoking-room, as far as the master of the house was concerned, only in name—into the conservatory. They might have gone through the bow-window into the garden, and both would have much preferred it; but even now in his absorption Sir Lionel's man's chivalry knew that the May evening air might prove hurtful to the white-clad lily by his side. Many a future has been formed, many a death-blow has been struck, amidst the perfume of flowers!

Have they marked what has passed beside them, or do they only mock us by their assumed loveliness and sweetness and grace into thinking they are at one with us in our moods and thoughts?

"Lilian"—he had always called her Lilian since he had carried her on his shoulder and rescued her

ball from his retriever; it was no new thing to him, as it is to most men at a time like this—"Lilian, I have much to say to you." His voice to himself sounded as if from one afar off, it was so deep and low. He had intended to say much more; he only added: "May I say it?" and sought to draw her to him; that fair lily, looking so fair then in outline and shadow in her white soft dress.

"Sir Lionel, forgive me—pray forgive me; but I cannot, dare not, hear it!"

There was no mistaking this for a girl's startled, doubtful, maidenly, shrinking answer.

Whatever else Lilian was she was a woman, and she knew her own mind, and in his inmost soul Sir Lionel knew that she knew it. He bowed his head for a moment in that sort of prayer which men utter between clenched teeth, with their fingers locked within one another.

Then he spoke again; he could not help it; he knew it was hopeless, and yet he spoke. How hardly men strive not to see and know their doom! His voice was deep and low: "Lilian, do you know what love can be? How it can crush self into the earth; how it can forestall every wish; how it can forget itself and only know one will and one wish; how a whole life can be one long devotion, one long self-denying, self-forgetting, self-obliterating love? That love I offer you, Lilian, this night. God help me, for God knows it is the love I bear you!" It was with truest reverence that he spoke.

Lilian struggled with herself for a moment to speak words worthy of the greatness of those which had been spoken to her; but from her compressed

lips there only fell two, but they were ominous for all time—"I cannot!"

"Then God help me in His mercy to bear it!"

And Lilian answers "Amen."

The sound of that "Amen" seemed to cling to the walls and the flowers for many a long year. Lilian's face was very white as she went home that night.

## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE RECTORY PRECINCTS.

THE time is early morning still, although the labourer has been at his work for some hours, and the lark has almost reached his midday carol. It is ten o'clock. Let me give you first of all a clearer idea where I am taking you to, and then I will introduce you to Lilian in her morning gown. As we come down the village street, we find standing straight in our way the churchyard, which slopes upwards in no very gentle incline to the church. To escape this the public drive winds round the foot of the hill, and so reaches its destination beyond. We are, however, tied down by no such restrictions; we can climb hills, you and I, dear reader, as easily as traverse level roads. So we push open the wicket-gate, and cross the churchyard by the flagged walk which terminates below at the Rectory gate, leading us on the way quite close to the church, so that were the windows a little lower and less embrowned by dust, we might peer in and see the ghosts of past auditors listening to the ghosts of long-forgotten discourses. I am afraid, by the bye, if these shadowy auditors really listened; they had much improved on their progenitors in the flesh. We cannot [illegible] giving a look of reverent admiration to the [illegible] c[illegible]

building as we traverse the footpath by its side. Glebeshire is the county of noble old churches, and amongst the very noblest of all is that of Misterton —traceried windows, massive architecture, a transept flanked with two side chapels, and over all the glamour of great age and immemorial reverence. On either side the ground slopes down, so that the church is a well-known landmark to the country side. Close to the principal entrance, fronting on the main street, three footpaths converge on one another. One leads past a newly-added portion of God's Acre to the open country; the middle one makes straight for the Rectory; a third leads to the village highway below. We follow the middle course, and so reach the large Rectory gates. On our left is the stable, and with it the coach-house or houses. We pass under some trees, almost but not quite an avenue; nothing could be stiff and regular within any distance at all under the influence of Misterton Rectory; and this leads us straight to the front door, if this expression is admissible about anything not garnished with a bright brass knocker. This, however, is not our destination, so we skirt the house, keeping round it to the right—the front door being on one side—passing the dining and drawing-room windows on our right, and a large croquet and tennis lawn on our left, until we come to the conservatory, which has one door opening upon the garden and another on the drawing-room. We pass through the door opening from the garden, and there we find Lilian.

It is the morning after the eventful dinner. Lilian is again dressed in white, although the material is

different from that of the preceding evening; it suits both herself and her name. It is not tight-fitting, but loose in the bodice and gathered in at the waist; she has it tucked up round her, showing a grey skirt below, as her occupation is watering; and water being self-willed, sometimes goes where it is neither intended nor desired. Lilian always undertook the watering, weeding, and tending of certain plants, chiefly ferns, she called her own; and generally did it first thing after breakfast. This morning she was later than usual, having first performed a commission for her mother, which consisted of taking a basket of tempting delicacies for the old clerk, whose fall had occasioned a severe sprain. "Thank 'ee, miss," he had said; "it couldn't but seem nicer-like, even if 'twere the same, when you bring it than from the old missis." A piece of one-sided courtesy which did not seem particularly complimentary to the partner of his old age. However, they both loved, as indeed did all the village, gentle and simple, their Rector's Miss Lilian. Lilian's thoughts this morning, as she tends her much-loved fronds, are not of the pleasantest description. It may be questioned whether we ever find it so really agreeable, as we all think we do, before and after, when the time comes for us to be men and women and think for ourselves. Hitherto others have thought for us, now they can do so no longer; and the stern fact of life, responsible life, comes home to us with intense force and reality. It is a nature little worthy or capable of fulfilling the responsibility before it, that does meet the occasion, when it comes, with a pray higher guidance and a strength not our own.

had no doubt that the course she had taken was the right one—in fact, the only one. What might have been a temptation to some girls was none to her. She had the instinct of true breeding, and the meretricious attractions of position, wealth, and rank weighed as nothing with her when she was asked for love which she could not give—asked, too, by a man that she knew was worthy of all the love and devotion a woman can offer to the man of her true choice. She could have wished it otherwise for his sake, for her own sake, and for the sake of her parents, and of his mother. He had ever been an upright, honourable gentleman, a loving, devoted son, true and just in all his dealings; he lived certainly very nearly up to the standard of that wonderful description of a Christian gentleman that we find in a certain old compilation called "The Church Catechism." Her parents liked him—he had almost been as a son to them; his mother would have welcomed his choice of her with all her heart; but, unfortunately, there was one drawback—she loved him not. And so she knew, and he knew, it could never be.

The watering proceeds rather dreamily this morning, and the weeds are recognized and removed rather by the instinct of long practice than from any distinguishable effort of the will. Things seem so different after they have taken place from what they do before. Some light always must be thrown upon events by their actual occurrence, however much we may seem to have seen and calculated all possibilities and consequences beforehand; and Lilian had conned this over pretty well, we may be sure. Lilian's thoughts have gone on now from the night

before into the future. She feels that the old intercourse, companionship, and friendship with the family at the Grange can never be resumed quite where it left off—before the proposal and its rejection. It is this view which is so new to her. Before the event took place her whole thoughts had been taken up with the imminence of the thing itself. She had asked herself times out of number whether it could be avoided altogether; but the very terms of their old intimacy, and the familiar relationship they had always borne to one another, prevented the use of those arts which young ladies, as a rule, understand so well; the art, namely, of keeping at bay: oftenest resorted to, I am afraid, by those who are engaged in making up their minds whether the partner is all that they can desire or their mothers expect. Then from the possibility of avoidance her thoughts had gone on to the how it would come? and the way it must be met?

How many times had she gone over what she should say to prove her respectful affection for Sir Lionel, which could, nevertheless, never deepen into love. She wished, above all, to hurt him as little as possible; and yet, when the time came, her lips would not frame what her heart wished to speak. And now it was all over, and for the first time she faced the future before them.

In the fashionable world people forget these *contretemps* conveniently soon. Men meet the girl who has refused them again and again at balls and assemblies, and before the end of the season they are paying their court to another, which probably turns out differently. But this is not often the case with people

who, like Lilian and Sir Lionel, have known each other for years; who have always breathed the same air, and shared the same round of little things, which make up the sum of most human lives. Love, then, whether it be on one side only, or whether it be mutual, is no gourd-like growth, springing up in a night and disappearing in a night. It is a habit, an existence; not an excrescence merely, but a graft which has become part of the tree. When this is severed it is often a life-blow, sometimes a death-blow. Lilian felt that to Sir Lionel there could be no return to the old habits of easy intercourse and social fellowship. She knew that she had lost the best and, withal, the dearest friend she had in the world—mark me, the friend, not the friendship!—and this troubled her much. It would trouble her father, too, who as yet was unconscious of the volcano which had appeared at his very feet. Do not think her selfish. Her first thought had been for Sir Lionel. His face, with the bitter blow upon it, had haunted her all night; second to this was the thought what this great landmark in her life meant, and would mean, to her. Her watering-can has long been lying idle on the woodwork before her, and her own gaze riveted on a bush of maidenhair fern, which she does not see, when the door leading from the drawing-room into the conservatory opens, and Mrs. Beachwood enters. The light footfall did not disturb the reverie until her mother's hand on her arm sent a start of surprise through her frame, and the blush of surprise mounted to her face. Strange and foolish as it may seem, her first thought was, "Could it be Sir Lionel?"

Every instinct in her would have told her how impossible it was, had she given herself time for them to operate; but her thoughts had been centred on him, and when the touch came, he for a moment seemed the only person in the world. It was almost with relief that she found herself face to face with her mother. It was the first time they had been alone together since just before lunch the day before. To one of them, at any rate, a lifetime seemed to have passed since then. Mrs. Beachwood had noticed the traces of the night's unrest on her daughter's face at breakfast. She knew the night before that her daughter could not have borne a word, even from her, that night; they had only kissed; not even said "good-night." Now she takes her into her arms; Lilian's head goes down on her mother's shoulder, and she cries as she has not cried since the boy had been brought home; and Lilian, in her black dress, looking more like a lily than ever, had stood by her mother's side by the open grave, and seen him laid to rest there. When the paroxysm had subsided, they go out into the garden together, with their arms intertwined, and there for an hour walk up and down on the grass and talk, until Lilian has recovered her usual staid composure. Then her mother says, "Now, Lily, I must go in and see cook. Don't you think you had better put your things on and go to the church for an hour's practice on the organ?"

"Very well, mother mine, I will go at once; it will do me good to try over that new *Te Deum* for Sunday. If only I could learn more of the spirit of the *Te Deum*—I am sure I play it often

enough—I think I could feel much happier for the future!"

I am afraid Lilian's grief was like most other grief, a little morbid. Mrs. Beachwood watched Lilian with anxious, loving eyes down the walk past the stables—getting the key as she passed from its nail in the coach-house—up the flagged walk, until she was lost to sight round the angle of the church. Then she turned into the house with a sigh: she did not go, however, to the kitchen, but into the study. It was necessary that the Rector should know an outline, at any rate, of what had happened. She had said nothing about it to Lilian; it was a duty all her own.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LAST OF AN OLD FRIEND.

SELDOM had the Rev. Llewellyn Beachwood exhibited more surprise, and at first incredulity, than he did that morning on first hearing his wife's story. As I have said, not a breath of suspicion had crossed his mind. He was not one to notice such a thing of any one, and Lilian was to him as yet only a child; he could only mutter, half in soliloquy to himself, half in protest to his wife:

"Impossible, impossible! Battersby want to marry Lilian! Why, he must be forty; and she, why, what age is the child?"

The Rector, though only just setting his foot on the last rung of the ladder of threescore years, was an old man before his time. He had never been the same man since that fatal accident to his boy Reginald. He was dearly loved and carefully tended by wife and daughter, who kept from him as far as possible all causes of anxiety and harass. It took him some time to appreciate quite what this story meant. That Sir Lionel really loved his daughter; that his daughter was no longer a child, but that most dangerous of all possible possessions, a marriageable woman; and that she knew her own mind, and

that that mind was averse to Sir Lionel, at any rate as a husband. When Mr. Beachwood did understand and appreciate the story in all its bearings, it filled him with grave concern. The family at the Grange were his co-workers in all schemes for the good of the parish; there had always been perfect unanimity between Rector and Squire; the latter had always regarded the former as a second father, and as the best possible spiritual director and adviser. The Rector had ever found in the young baronet a ready hand, an open purse, a long head, and a warm heart. Lady Battersby, too, was no mere Lady Bountiful; that is, she did not regard herself as of superior clay, and dispense all help through the kitchen department. She was a God-fearing woman, and God-fearing women have a genuine love and respect for their fellow-humans. Every girl in Misterton and Bickley—the two principal villages near to Misterton Grange—and on the estate, found in her a real guide, help, counsellor, and friend, and every mother found her all tenderness and sympathy, just when women most want tenderness and sympathy.

The Rector asked himself, and, more than this, he asked his wife, "Was this all to come to an end?" And for no reason in the world except a mad freak of a little blind god. One thing was certain, things could not be quite the same; in what the difference would consist, time alone could show.

It was lunch-time before the talk in the study had worked itself to a conclusion. After the bell rang they went out into the hall, and so into the dining-room. As they entered by the door Lilian entered by the open window.

"Come here, Lilian," said her father, "I want to look at you."

The girl blushed and hung down her head slightly.

Mr. Beachwood looked at her fixedly for a minute or two, as a geologist would at an unexpected stone in a different stratum, or a naturalist at a new specimen. In that look he learnt more of the state of the case than he had done during the whole conversation with his wife; he learnt that he was the father of a very beautiful, and, therefore, of a very dangerous woman. He turned to his wife, half with a sigh, half with a smile: "She is a bigger lassie than you ever were, Mary, but she is strangely like her mother about the eyes." His words meant more than they said. They showed that his thoughts had gone back and opened the shutters, and looked in amongst the dust and the cobwebs of the past.

The love of those early days was no passing flame; it had only deepened and intensified as the years silvered their brows with the winter time. It was pleasant to him to see again a living reminder of what Mary De la Cœur had been in the days when he sought her in the May and married her when the leaves were falling, and the autumn bronze was on the ground. The talk at lunch rippled back into the past, to a nutting expedition they had had together, when Mary De la Cœur had striven to reach a cluster hanging over a pond, famous for its depth and the coolness of its water, fed by some deep-buried spring; how she had fallen in, and he had jumped in and supported her until both were nearly drowned.

Lilian listened to them as they talked, and wondered what made her father so unusually talkative; and she little dreamt the cause, that he had just seen the first self of her mother over again in her own face.

After luncheon was over Mr. Beachwood went across the room and kissed his wife—a rare demonstration with him, even before Lilian—then he took his daughter's arm, and said, "Come, Lily, I have something to say to you; let us say it amongst the wallflowers."

They went out together, through the French window and across the grass; then the Rector sat down on a garden seat, mainly dedicated to the use of those who watched the tennis.

"Lily, your mother tells me you are twenty this month; I see your counterparts flowering in the garden. Can they really have flowered and faded nineteen times since the year our Lily came? I suppose you know that you are a woman; and I hear, and am sorry to hear it, that the responsibilities of womanhood have come upon you all too soon."

Lilian said nothing, only stirred a tuft of moss with the side of her foot; but there was a conscious blush on her sweet face and a tremble about her lips. It was but rarely that her father spoke to her in so grave a tone.

Mr. Beachwood looked at her fixedly for a moment and then went on, "I think it right, my child, to say this to you. You are young; are you sure in this matter you can yet be said to know your own mind? Sir Lionel Battersby is a man I much and, I think, deservedly respect; he is all that can be

wished personally; rather old, perhaps;" this was said rather dubitatively. Mr. Beachwood was not quite sure about his diplomacy just here. "There are other matters—the relationship, nay, more, the warm friendship between the two houses, which I cannot help considering, but which I do not wish to bias you. Are you sure your rejection of Sir Lionel is quite final? Did you act only on a young girl's impulse?"

Whether the Rector really hoped for a different answer I cannot be sure; he did not expect one. Mrs. Beachwood had taken care of that. She did not wish Lilian to be put to any unnecessary pain or trouble.

The girl's answer came after a moment, clear and distinct, but low: "I would do anything to please you, father, that I could. I like and respect Sir Lionel, but I cannot, do not love him. I never shall!"

The Rector did not further discuss the matter; they walked together to the house and then parted, both with a decided sense of relief.

As Lilian lighted her bedroom candle that night a note, which had come by a messenger, and which did not require an answer, was brought her by a maid. Instinct told her without looking at the handwriting from whence it came. She did not open it until after she was in the privacy of her own room, and had bent her head in her usual evening prayer. Then she sat on her bed and read her letter. She had correctly surmised. It was dated from Misterton Grange, and signed "Lionel Battersby." It read as follows:—

"MY DEAR MISS LILIAN,

"To-morrow my mother and I are going southwards, preparatory to a long stay on the Continent. I cannot go without saying 'Good-bye' to you.

"I could not, did not, say much to you last night, but you must know now that my love is not likely to be a changing one; it has only dug its foundations deep down in my heart more and more in the past, until it has become the settled dominant feeling of my life. I do not say this either with a view of changing your decision, or to teach you how great the blow is to me; but I do say it, that you may know that through the changing years I shall remain to you the same; and when in life's pathway you require a friend, in the only true sense of the word, seek it, and you will always find it, in

"LIONEL BATTERSBY.

"P.S.—My mother will write from London to Mrs. Beachwood."

Lilian closed the letter with a deep sigh. "Would that he had chosen any one else! He is true, at any rate, to the motto of the Battersbys—'Courteous in prosperity, brave in adversity.'"

## CHAPTER V.

### DAMON AND PYTHIAS.

"ATTERLEY EDGE,
"*June 22nd.*

"MY DEAREST RAY,

"I want a holiday, and by a holiday I mean not only cessation from work, but cessation from worry. I want change. I have got to loathe and abhor towns, and the dwellers in them. Will you come with me and help me to 'do' the country? You require no holiday, seeing that you do no work; nevertheless, my friend, my *alter ego*, my worse self, come with me and take one.

"Now, granted that you say 'Yes'—you were never known to say 'No' when you were really wanted—the next question is, What *habitat* shall we choose wherein to ruralize together? I can answer that too. I have a cousin, as you well know, who owns a cottage and a stream in the village of Bickley, in the county of Glebeshire. In the stream trout live. My cousin, who has never acknowledged my existence in his life before, but whose memory has been stimulated by the appearance of an article, well known to you and me, in the columns of the *Monthly Repeater*, has written offering me the use of both—or all three I might say, cottage, stream and

trout—for self and any friends I may wish to take with me. He is abroad for his health—his disease being chiefly corpulence, I should have thought it the worst place in the world for him. He imagines I shall be free somewhere about this time, and that I, by virtue of my profession, may be trusted not to destroy or deface all his household gods; hence his offer, hence my letter. I am free for the month of July from duties ecclesiastical; will you come and spend that month with me as host and entertainer at 'The Cottage,' Bickley?

"Yours exceedingly,
"WALTER BERESFORD."

"WINDERMERE,
"*June 23rd.*

"MY DEAR WALTER,

"*Bis dat, qui cito dat.* Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November. June precedes July. On the 30th of June the personal belongings of Raymond Winslow will be packed. On the 1st of July they will be carted to the station, and Raymond himself will be ready for dinner, or its country equivalent, at six in the evening in 'The Cottage,' Bickley.

"Yours still more,
"R. W."

It is rude to call early in the morning; nevertheless we will go and take a peep at the occupants of the above-named dwelling-place at 9.30 on the morning of the 2nd of July. They are breakfasting—not a country breakfast hour, but a country

breakfast—namely, ham and eggs; plenty of ham, plenty of eggs. Their toilet apparently has been performed with a view rather to ensure themselves comfort than to adorn the man. They are in light boating or cricket-flannel coats, and without collars. Still, there is no mistaking the fact that Walter Beresford is an ordained son of the Church of England, and that Raymond Winslow does not belong to that profession. They are old school and college chums, but for the last five years their paths have diverged one from another. The one had been labouring as a hard-working curate at the large and important town of Atterley Edge, in the north of Yorkshire; the other had been a waif and a stray throughout the world—now at Medina, now at Jerusalem, now in Switzerland, and again in a certain vine and ivy-clad Abbey House near the great lake at Windermere, which owned him as its lord. They corresponded at intervals, in the desultory way in which young men do keep up correspondence, but they loved each other as brothers none the less for that. They had only met twice at the Oxford and Cambridge match and their school dinner, held about the same time at Willis's Rooms, in the five years. So much as a summary of their history up to the present. Now for themselves, outwardly and inwardly. I cannot help thinking that friendship, like love, is dependent generally on the sympathy of diversity. We are all more or less, most of us more, egotistical; we are not over fond of rivals near the throne; and, depend upon it, those are the truest friendships, and that is the most lasting love, in which dissimilarity forbids rivalry. The Rev. Walter

Beresford was dark, slight of build, and of middle height; quick to think and prompt to execute; sensitive to every criticism, extracting much honey during his life's labour, but meeting and feeling many a sting from the drones who would have enjoyed his success could they have obtained it without effort. Few men more gifted than he, and fewer still who made a nobler use of their gifts for the good of others; yet he earned much respect, but very little love, as far as the sterner sex was concerned. If they jarred upon him he told them so; he was quick to detect their weakness—the littleness of their aims; and he distributed his advice, his orders, or his scorn all too freely. With the other sex it was quite the contrary. He had never known his father, who died in his infancy; his home had been amongst women, and women, too, of that nobler stuff which, when combined with and guided by man's strength, mould men into heroes. He had learnt true chivalry from his youth up, and it proved a life-long lesson. His was not the deference of simulated respect, but the delicate homage of the man who knows woman only in the grandeur and strength of pure sweetness and sweet purity. Such a character a woman intuitively reads; she compares him with her own masculine circle; she finds them wanting. It is a dangerous time for her peace and rest when this feeling comes upon her. Raymond Winslow was Walter Beresford's exact counterpart. Blue eyes, fair hair, six feet two high, broad of chest and brawny of limb, quiet, sarcastic, meditative, with any amount of possibility, but little execution. True as steel, and strong as a lion in

the hour of danger, but hard to rouse except on great emergencies; fonder of rest than work; his one weakness was travel; he loved to study human nature of all kinds; his rendering of it, which, however, he kept mainly to himself, was infinitely humorous and playful. Men would do anything for him; women demanded attention, and he never gave it them. No man gave more liberally than he, and with more real feeling and sympathy for human need and human suffering, but it was always with a half-sarcasm, as if to deprecate applause. I have known him, for instance, give half-a-crown to a beggar-woman in the streets simply because she held out a little babe to him, and said she wanted food; but after he had done it he remarked that anything more like a stuffed child he had never seen.

"Well, Ray."

After a pause, "Well, Walter."

"What shall we do to-day? There is the stream, only there is not a breath of wind stirring, and I know the fish will never bite; then the Welsh hills are only four miles away, and there is Misterton Church to see—a very fine piece of architecture I am told, and I suppose——"

"My dear fellow, don't take the trouble to suppose anything, at any rate for my benefit. I am done up. I travelled yesterday, to-day I rest. I shall find a bank where there are no flies or caterpillars, and there I shall remain for the day. If you are sensible you will do likewise; as you never were or are sensible you will certainly do nothing of the sort. One consolation, when you have hurried

yourself into your grave I shall still be vegetating on slowly, but surely, towards a respectable old age."

"A short word of only four letters, old fellow—'Bosh.' Any way, I will come with you and take a morning pipe to help to keep the flies off you, and the midges from browsing on your six-foot-two of brawn, and then I will explore a bit for myself if you really are too lazy or 'tired!'" This last word with deliberation, as a quotation.

Ten minutes more and the two friends, slightly more dressed, have adjourned to the lawn, and so on down to the banks of the river, where they select a comfortable slope whereon to recline—Walter Beresford armed with a clay pipe, Raymond Winslow with a novel. Few things are pleasanter for a change than lying on your back on a warm July morning, with the pleasant but not engrossing occupation of a pipe, watching the light fleecy clouds come by a sort of attraction together from different parts of the blue above, and then dissipate and vanish into thin air. It is an attitude suitable to dreaming, and both young men dreamed in their several and distinct ways.

## CHAPTER VI.

### "IN MAIDEN MEDITATION, FANCY FREE."

HOW glorious is the morning sunshine in July! It seems to bear on its bosom a soft haziness, lending a dreaminess to the landscape and a far-off dimness to horizon and sky.

It is half-past ten. Lilian is alone. Her greenhouse has long ago been watered. No village duty demands her attention. She is free to wander forth and dream, or read, or work in the warm glow of the sunshine. She is wearing the same white morning gown, only a hat of white too, with a creamy feather, has been added to complete her attire; fastened in her brooch is a *gloire de Dijon* rosebud with a sprig of greenery as a background. She has a book in her hand; it is the "Daughter of Heth." Her library is not a large one, and she has read it many times before.

It is said that if you go into a man's library you can decipher his character without once seeing the occupant himself. It is not always true. It is very often true both of men and women, oftener, perhaps, of the latter than the former. You can rarely generalize with safety about the sexes. There are masculine women and feminine men, and between these two there are divers grades where each has

borrowed some quality of the other. Lilian's library was limited. She rarely bought books, and when she did they were oftener old friends than new ones, which she preferred to possess rather than borrow. Once a year, on her birthday, she was enriched with two new ones from her godmother—an old maiden lady—and from her mother. No two books could be more different. The one was meant mainly to amuse; the other to edify and instruct. The former generally succeeded in doing both; the latter as often failed to do either. Lilian did not care much how books were written, she liked certain characters; they were real characters to her, and it was for these that she loved her books. She interweaved them into her own life; tried to imagine them situated as she was, and wondered if they would act as she did.

They had all had offers from Sir Lionel, and all been obliged very reluctantly and with much misgiving to say no. This morning, however, the book was apparently only an excuse. Lilian crossed the garden through a sort of shrubbery and a little wicket gate, and so on to the field-way beyond. She was still on the same ridge of the hill upon which the Rectory was built; before her was the same valley view as that from the Rectory windows and lawn; had she traversed the footpath farther she would have come to the end of the ridge, and there before her would have lain one of the finest views England can produce. She was not thinking of views just now; and if she had been the one before her was lovely enough. No one was likely to pass that way, and if they happened to do so it mattered

little. She sat down. An oak-tree stretched its boughs overhead. Sparrows twittered in its branches. A lark carolled far out of sight, now and again dipping down a little as if to catch some earthly inspiration to mingle with the heavenly notes that it learnt in the sky. Some cows stood and lay beneath the shade of a tree in the field below, lazily chewing the cud, and apparently reflecting cow-thoughts in happy silence. Everything seemed to feel the drowsy, sleep-loving, sleep-inspiring influence of the warm July haze. Lilian's thoughts, as she sat and gazed into the far-off land of her own fancy, were half peaceful, half restive. The peace was the more external feeling; the restlessness more the birth of the true spirit within. As I have said, few great incidents had ever disturbed the even tenor of her life—none since she had emerged into her maturer girlhood. The incident of Sir Lionel had moved her strangely. She had never cast the least thought of regret after her determination that eventful night. What she did then she would do again if need be, without thought of hesitation. Her life, however, did not seem somehow quite the same. Before, her every-day incidents and routine had been quite sufficient; they had supplied the needs of her nature; now she hardly knew why they seemed a little humdrum. They were the same, but she was different. She felt a want, but hardly knew what it was. She dearly loved her home and her home life. Cows and horses were alike her friends with the men and women, gentle and simple, around her, only now their friendship seemed hardly sufficient. Her thoughts this morning were day-dreams

of the very dreamiest sort—huge castellated mansions with the most shadowy foundations. She would like to do something in the great world; and of the great world she knew so little. Surely she had a mission. Every one had a mission if they could only find it out, and fulfil it. Hers certainly was not matrimony; she was quite certain of that. What, then, was it? She came of too noble a stock, and she was of too noble a nature, to map out anything for herself that was unworthy of her, or merely selfish in its aim and end. She would like to have aided in the regeneration of mankind, to have written books that would have been a help to other women, as other women's books had been a help to her; but she could only tell the story of her own life, and that could interest no one, much less do them any good. Most of her heroines had had circumstances made to suit them; she alone seemed to be doomed to vegetate on idly like the moss at her feet or the ivy tendrils overhead.

As she turned her face upwards the last seemed to suggest a new train of thought. What a strange union it seemed between the ivy and the oak! So dissimilar and yet so closely bound together; the one firm and upright, the other taking a thousand forms and curves; the ivy binding the oak in a close, loving embrace, growing closer day by day, and week by week, and year by year, sheltering the bare stem with its leaves from the scorching of summer sun and the biting cold of winter frost. And she wondered whether this was God's own type of what that life should be which He from two makes one—whether He intends to teach us, who find it so hard

to learn the lesson, that each ought to give what the other wants; that the one is the complement of the other—that in which alone can be full sufficiency. And even in death the ivy clings to and covers the oak with its own abundant life; as if to say that death is not a division, only another phase of union. And as she thought and dreamed her dreams grew more and more blurred and indistinct; until at last the cadence of the lark was lost, and the ivy ceased to speak, and—she—slept!

It was not a much frequented road, except by the cows and a stray donkey or two, and the labourer on his homeward way. Many a morning Lilian might have dreamed and slept there at will; and no one but the cows, and the sparrows, and the donkey, would have been one whit the wiser; but to-day, as it happened by chance, as people say, two young men passed along that road. They were much too polite to stop and look—but they looked nevertheless.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

NEWS travels fast everywhere; but in the country, where it is a rare and precious commodity, it seems, like electricity, to be in the air, not communicated by word of mouth, but absorbed into the system, with other atmospheric particles, through the respiratory organs. Every one knew the day after they had arrived that two gentlemen, one of them a clergyman, had taken possession of Captain Lloyd Beresford's cottage for the fishing. It had not reached the Rectory circle, however, on the morning of the day after that before Lilian went out, but it reached both the Rector and his wife immediately afterwards from two independent sources. It permeated from the clerk's boy, who was under the gardener and useful factotum of the house, through the kitchen, to the mistress when she went down to make her arrangements for the day. The Rector heard it from the village blacksmith when he called to inquire after certain twins, forming the latest human addition to his parishioners.

At luncheon it formed the topic of conversation. The Rector communicated the intelligence first. It was news to Lilian, not to his wife.

"I suppose, my dear, I had better call and ask

him to preach next Sunday morning. It is rather a risk. Young men have such strange new views now-a-days. What with the Oxford School and the Broad Church School, I don't wish my parishioners to be upset with any new-fangled notions or advanced rubbish."

"I am afraid there is not much fear. Nothing short of an earthquake would do that. Besides," continued Mrs. Beachwood, "I suppose all young men do not belong to the new schools. None of the young curates about here do."

"Well, we shall see," said the Rector, dubitatively.

"How about the tennis-party on Saturday? Are they to be asked? I expect they will find it very dull here; we are in duty bound to do all we can for them. Did you say one of them was a relation of Captain Beresford's father?"

"Yes, my dear, the clergyman's name is Beresford, Sprigg tells me. I shall know all about him when I have looked him out in Crockford."

Investigation of that well-informed authority set all doubt at rest. He could be only one of the Beresfords there set forth at length. Mr. Beachwood summarized the information for his wife and daughter. Lilian, looking over his shoulder, had already digested it for herself.

"Oxford, Atterley Edge, Yorkshire. Why he must be curate to my old friend Wyncombe, nearly five years ordained. A place to take the extra steam out of a man."

The upshot of which was that the Rector called that afternoon on the two young men; was told they were at the river; followed them there; found

one of them fishing and the other looking on ; gave his wife's and his own invitation to the tennis-party, and also invited Walter Beresford's assistance for the following Sunday morning or evening. Both accepted the tennis invitation, but Walter Beresford would be glad of the Sunday's rest after much hard work, but promised assistance for the following Sunday.

It was Thursday when the invitation came. On Friday it rained all day. Both young men found it very dull indoors. Walter Beresford took the opportunity of writing a long letter to his mother, who was staying at Thun for her health. He was very proud and fond of his mother, who generally lived six months of the year with him at Atterley Edge, and stayed the rest of the time with her married daughter. Walter Beresford's patrimony consisted mainly of his education and his profession. He was fond of writing, and a clear and incisive thinker on many subjects. His skill in this respect not only afforded him relaxation and amusement, but frequently gave him a sensible pecuniary addition to his income.

Over tea in the evening—both young men preferred it to dinner—Walter Beresford referred to the incident of the day before.

"I wonder whether it is the custom of the country for young ladies to sleep out of doors—and in the morning, too?"

"Why not in the morning just as good a time as any other?" remarked his friend. "It is a fine thing if it is the custom. Women are always in mischief when they are awake—especially young women."

"Perhaps she wasn't a young woman after all. What do you say to a Dryad? They say they live in oaks, and she was just underneath one."

"I don't remember that it is recorded in the Ancients that Dryads read novels; and, if I mistook not, something uncommonly like one had but just slipped from her fairy fingers when the *genius loci* fanned her to sleep."

Walter Beresford laughed aloud. "Why Ray, old fellow, I never knew you take so much notice of any one before. Fancy you in love; what fun it would be!"

"Thank you," growled his friend; "you are welcome to get all the fun out of it when it happens. I fancy, like port wine, you will have to keep it a long time before you use it."

About the same time the night before, the Rector had been relating the result of his visit to his wife and daughter over dinner.

"I never saw two young men who appeared so exactly opposite to one another. Both gentlemen, however; I think, on the whole, you will like them. One seemed very lazy and spoke very little. Luckily not the parson. He was introduced to me as Mr. Raymond Winslow. I suppose they must have been friends for a long time, otherwise Mr. Beresford would hardly have used his Christian name in an introduction. Certainly it is not a case of *similes similibus congregantur*, or its English equivalent, 'Birds of a feather flock together.'" (The Rector's Latin was always much appreciated in the household, especially by the servants, probably because no one understood it.) "At any rate, they

will be an addition to the tennis. Nearly all the people who have accepted are the people who cannot play; while the people who can have all promised to be somewhere else."

"You said he would not preach on Sunday, dear father?"

"No, my dear, not till the Sunday after."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE RECTORY TENNIS-PARTY.

SATURDAY broke warm, bright, and cheery. The sun seemed to be renewing its old acquaintanceship with its neighbour planet with even unusual glee and pleasure. The cows rubbed their noses against one another, and were evidently in the best of tempers. The flies danced merrily. The music of thrush and blackbird mingled with the harsh dissonance of the corn-crake. All nature sang together the gladsome praises of God. By half-past three the Rectory lawn was bright with gaily-dressed groups of people, chiefly gathered round a large copper beech, which reared its head at one corner in line with the front door. The two young men had come as they were bidden—in tennis dress and overcoats. They were hardly prepared for so large an assemblage. All round the carriage-houses traps of all kinds were standing about without the horses, which were tethered indoors, and under the trees by the stables. As they entered by the big gate they were almost driven over by a lady driving herself, with a [illegible] sitting behind with his arms folded.

"I say, Walter, does the old gentleman [illegible] coming to play tennis? Coming to face the [illegible] at bay would be much nearer the mark.

prefer 'the stag at bay' myself. The stout lady who nearly slaughtered us by way of preliminary does not mind showing her stockings apparently." This was said *à propos* of the descent of the lady in question, who heartily shook the Rector's hand.

"Where have you left your husband, Lady Fairlegh?"

"I did not leave him, he left me. Jumped out, threw me the reins, and darted into Spriggs, the blacksmith's. I declare, if he does it again, I must have your gates widened. I never was good at coming round corners; and to-day I first of all nearly did for the trap and myself, and, finally, for two gentlemen whom I see have now come up."

The Rector greeted the two young men kindly, and introduced them. Lady Fairlegh made her apologies, laying the blame on her husband, the mare, and the Rector for having such narrow gates, in about equal proportion.

"Never mind; Ralph shall compensate for my clumsiness by asking you both to dinner. Pity there is no shooting for you, fishing is so slow."

The Rector next presented his visitors to Mrs. Beachwood, and then to the company, or, at any rate, such as he thought they would care to know. Lilian had not yet come out. All the country side seemed to be represented. The Earl of Middlemass, squires of broad acres, and squires of narrow ones, and the inevitable parsons; fat, comfortable rectors, one or two sporting vicars, who were evidently from their talk and bearing no strangers to the saddle and the crop; and four or five curates, who, with the younger squires, made themselves useful in handing cups of

tea, and making up sets for the amusement of the on-lookers. Ladies were there of all ages and styles, dressed in the brightest and lightest of costumes; the older ones sitting about on garden-seats and chairs fetched from the house; the younger ones with rackets in their hands, prepared to do battle.

After a few minutes Lilian came out. She had been superintending the arrangements indoors—tea always being served at the long table in the dining-room for those who preferred having it there to outside on these occasions. She had abandoned white for the nonce, and was dressed in pink, with a large garden hat to shade her from the sun when she played, which she did, for a lady, remarkably well. The Rector introduced Walter Beresford and Raymond Winslow to her after she had greeted the principal guests and her immediate friends. After she had passed on to arrange a set—one had already commenced operation on the ground marked out on the farther part of the lawn—the young men were left standing together a little apart from the rest of the company, who were talking in groups, having, of course, much in common.

"So your Dryad is Miss Lilian Beachwood, is she? Humph! I daresay her eyes did require a little rest. She has done plenty of execution with them even in her short life, I will be bound. Take care, old fellow! I thought I saw her take you all in before she came up. If she has marked you down you will require plenty of pity before it is all over."

"She certainly is the finest girl I ever saw in my life."

"There! I knew how it would be. Take care,

old fellow. *Prenez garde,* monsieur, as the Frenchmen say."

Here the conversation was interrupted, as the Rector came up and said his daughter wanted a partner. Which of the young men would volunteer? In a few minutes both sets were hard at work, and Lilian Beachwood and Walter Beresford were playing partners.

Lady Fairlegh, after laughingly rating her husband, who had joined the party, now brought him up to Mr. Winslow to apologize, as she phrased it, for his misconduct. He was a fine, healthy-looking man, who might have been anything between five-and-thirty and five-and-forty. Before the afternoon was over these two had struck up a friendship; but, as he expressed it afterwards to his wife as they drove home, "He really could not stand the parson at any price. He was such a confounded prig."

The tennis meanwhile proceeded merrily. Lilian and her partner succeeded, after some exciting play, in winning four games to three; then their opponents seemed to get demoralized, for they defeated them easily the next two games, and so won the set. It was very hot; so, perhaps, that may have had something to do with it. Lilian played gracefully, but the lion's share of the work, of course, fell on the gentleman, who played, as he did all things, very energetically—only, perhaps, a little more judgment might have saved him some of the labour. It is curious how into little things men and women carry precisely the same peculiarities and idiosyncrasies which have marked their efforts in the sterner battle

of life. There is a freemasonry in tennis as in other things. United effort and united victory seemed to have transformed the partners from acquaintances into friends.

"Now, Miss Beachwood, the next thing is to get cool. How are you going to do it? What shall I get you?"

"Thank you, Mr. Beresford, I am very hot. I feel there is nothing that would be so effective as a cup of tea. Most of the ladies seem to have come to the same conclusion as I have, and to have carried it out. If the dear mother does not want me for anything, I should like to have it under the tree at the farther side of the lawn. It is my favourite seat in the garden. We have a nice view of the house and lawn on the one side, and catch the first glimpse of people coming up the drive. You know women always are curious, Mr. Beresford."

The young man laughed, and said, "So they tell me. I have never noticed that they outdo the men in that respect."

"Then," she continued, "we have a view right down the valley for miles if we turn towards it, and to-day we shall have the smell of the hay, as they have been busy turning it after the heavy rain of yesterday. I always like the smell of the hay; I think it such a happy smell."

"Why a happy smell?"

"Oh, I don't know; I can hardly tell. Only it is so summery, and I love the summer, and the sunshine; and I am sure the birds love it too."

Walter Beresford soon returned with the tea and secured some claret for himself. He thought he had

never spent such a pleasant afternoon. The air was heavy with the scent of limes and sweet briar; the birds sang, and all things seemed sweet, and pleasant, and joyous. Their talk wandered on from one thing to another. She was interested to hear of his work at Atterley Edge. She had never dwelt in towns, and what seemed every-day and commonplace to him was all new to her.

"I think I should like to be a man. They can always be so useful, and find their own mission, and do their own work, while women must have it found for them, or live only for themselves!"

"Perhaps, if woman's mission were the same as man's, I should agree with you; but I am not amongst those who think it is. Probably you have been fulfilling your mission all your life without knowing it."

"I! Why, I have never done anything in the world!"

The young man looked incredulous, but said nothing; not, perhaps, because he had nothing to say.

## CHAPTER IX.

### EVENING.

IT was a glorious evening as they walked home; both had enjoyed themselves very much more than could have been expected amongst complete strangers; but the Glebeshire folk, as every one knows, are notorious for sociability and good fellowship. They had made an engagement for Monday to help the Rector in his hay-making in the two glebe-fields he retained for his own use, to supply the winter's needs of his pony. The hay season was somewhat late this year, but the crops on the whole were heavy and full. Here and there, as they passed along in the quarter mile which separated Bickley from Misterton, they could hear the pleasant whish of the scythe, or see the men in their shirt-sleeves and open throats, and the women with red and yellow handkerchiefs on their heads, raking the hay into cocks, or turning it with forks preparatory to leaving it for the night.

There seemed to be thunder in the air, and perhaps the morrow might see it come. They were in that happiest stage of friendship when it was not necessary to make conversation. Neither of the young men cared to do so apparently, so the journey home was performed in silence. After a bath, a

change of attire, and tea, Beresford left his companion to the quiet enjoyment of the *dolce far niente*, and sallied out by himself to see the sun set over the distant hills. Winslow had gone through, for him, the very violent exercise of a set at tennis, and his friend knew that his work was over for the day. I think he was not sorry, too, to have the companionship of his own thoughts only, for a time. No one occasionally appreciates solitude so much as the man who, as a rule, prefers company, and plenty of it. Walter Beresford was one of these. It was lucky for him that it was so. It goes hardly with a clergyman, and makes his work much more difficult, if he goes to it with an initial diffidence and dislike of the society of his fellows. I have said that his object was to see the sun set. I have noticed that whatever county you are in the natives tell you "that every one speaks of their sunsets; and that they do say that you never see such sunsets anywhere else." The fact is not to be wondered at. Every lovely sunset—and, to my mind, there is nothing like it in nature—seems to transcend all the others we have ever seen, for the very simple reason that it is before us, while they must necessarily only be matters of memory. Certainly the young clergyman felt that he must agree with the Glebeshire folk that, however much other sunsets might equal theirs, there was no place in the broad shires for seeing one like the brow of the ridge at right angles to both Bickley and Misterton; in fact, the end of the very pathway whereon grew the oak-tree which had sheltered the sleeping Dryad. To reach this he had to traverse for some distance a very narrow lane,

with banks so high and so covered with verdure of the wild braky sort, it was almost impossible to imagine the daylight ever came there, it being quite impossible to see anything on either side. After following the windings of this lane for some distance —even then moist, like a river-bed in which the river was almost dry—and marked with cow-tracks, he came to a stile; climbing over this and pursuing a very steep, although winding, track up the almost precipitate bank, at the top the full glory of the view burst upon him. It almost took his breath away, as it has done that of many before and since. It was about half-past seven. The sun had almost reached the horizon; above was a dome of perfectly cloudless blue—a deep living blue; below him the valley stretched out in all its various hues of summer green, dotted here and there with cows and occasional cottages and farm-buildings, without which signs of life no view is complete, as it wants some subtle chord of kinship and sympathy.

Beyond stretched the valley, beneath the sun, but partially in the shade, giving relief and quiet to the eye, were the Welsh hills, and then above—how shall I describe it?—the only clouds in the heavens seemed to be gathered above the sun, and they of that white fleecy kind which seem to lend themselves best to reflect all the glory the Day-god has to bestow. There seemed to be no end to the colours; shades upon shades of gold; shades upon shades of cream; shades upon shades of blue; this last of the brightest kind, quite different to that above him, and apparently farther off than the white. The young man bent his head in prayer and thanks-

giving to the great Creator. If earth were like this, what must Heaven be? Gradually, as he stood and watched, the sun sank lower and lower; half its disc disappeared; it shot farewell beams upwards as if to say good-bye. Perhaps at this moment the glory was even greater than before. Then slowly it vanished all together; and with it the fire seemed to have departed, and a rare soft sweetness settled over sky and landscape, breathing of peace—a peace so still, so profound, so vocal of sympathy and love, that it seemed to still the very beasts, and to speak to the young man with inarticulate voice-notes such as he had rarely, if ever, heard before.

For a time he did not even think. When he came back to himself hours seemed to have passed away, and he could have fancied that it was days ago since he played tennis on the Rector's lawn, and first met the Rector's daughter. A man brought up as Walter Beresford had been does not so readily and easily fall into love as other men do, who have not had the same advantages. The outside arts which catch others do not affect them. They have seen too much true metal not to be able to pick out the false from the real. They are deferential to all women, but home training prevents them from being lightly transformed from courtiers into slaves. They get to have a woman's insight into women, but without exactly recognizing all they see and feel; so they are saved from the cynicism which would often otherwise come upon them. Walter Beresford knew that he had met a rare woman, a true woman, a noble woman—that he had rarely seen such a one, perhaps never; lofty of soul, noble of purpose, clean,

and sweet, and pure; but there was no thought of himself in the matter. He could appreciate her as he could appreciate the soft odour of the rose, or the softness of the air, or even the beauty of the sky, or the graceful tints and shading of a picture. She was beauteous of mind and person, and he knew it. If she stirred him more than they did, he said it was only the sympathy of kind. So it has been said that round precipices wild roses grow and stretch out their tendrils, as if to hide the dark depths below; and many a one, they say—I know not if it be true—has walked into their doom amongst the roses, and never known until it was all over that any doom was there. Was this the case with Walter Beresford? Who knows?

It would be curious to read his friend's thoughts during his absence. They were confided to the river, and probably went no farther. "Well, I expect I am in for a pretty mess! I always did think our dark friend dangerous. I had a presentiment that some day he would land himself and me in something unpleasant, and here we are in the very thick of it. Unsuspecting father; confiding and much too hospitable mother; and last, but certainly not least, handsome—certainly much too handsome—daughter. Why, in the name of goodness, were not all women born old and ugly? Now the old housekeeper here, Mistress Barlow (she had just been out to try and persuade him it was damp, and that the vapours which exhaled from the river were dangerous, especially at this time of the year), I call her just the thing. Five-and-fifty, and plain; rude people would call her ugly. It takes dirt to make people

ugly; now she is always quite clean, I will say that for her. But the other woman, ugh! I am afraid it is a bad business. And she knows how to dress, too. I don't think Walter Beresford would ever be taken by an ill-dressed woman. Why, I do believe that if ever I married any one—which, thank goodness, I never shall—I would have a shot at the young woman myself. A very bad business." And the river heard it all, and only murmured something in reply. Was it a sigh of foreboding, or the loving voice of sympathy, or did it only whisper to itself?

## CHAPTER X.

### FORESHADOWING.

"So you have soon found the spot where the best view in all Glebeshire—and people hereabouts will tell you that is no slight thing to say—can be found, eh, Mr. Beresford?" The young man started—started, perhaps, even more than the event warranted. Then he turned round and found himself face to face with Mr. Beachwood and Lilian.

They had been near him for some minutes. The grass had deadened the sound of their foot-falls. At first they had been unwilling to disturb his reverie; he seemed at once so near and so far away, but after a time they almost felt they were poaching his very thoughts, hence the remark. The young man did not reply this time, because he really had nothing at hand to say. The older gentleman perceived his embarrassment, and to give him time went on,—"My daughter and I often come to the corner here to see the sun set, especially when it bids fair to be so beautiful as it has been to-night. I never dine late on a Saturday—I suppose because I nominally go into my study on that evening. In the summer I very rarely carry it out, however, as I find the early morning the best time for work. But to return to the sunset. I suppose you are satisfied?"

"Satisfied! why, it is like a sermon, only grander and deeper and more impressive than any sermon I have ever heard. It seems to me that I have never seen anything like it before. What a lovely valley, and the background of hills! See how dark they are becoming! And then the sky, how wonderfully glorious it was just now! Every moment the lines of colour seem to soften, as if to say that the great painter is getting farther and farther from his canvas. I never feel so near God as I do when nature brings me almost whether I will or no to Him."

The young man spoke enthusiastically. His face was lit up with a kindred glow to that of the sky. Those two were both natives of the soil, and they loved it. They felt something of a similar pleasure, when he spoke so warmly of the landscape, that an egotist experiences when he hears himself approved and extolled. Lilian said nothing; but she was all the more drawn to her new friend by the fact that he had evidently forgotten her existence altogether —a totally new experience to her. When he did remember it he coloured, and turned to her, "I suppose those hills are in Wales?"

"Yes; do you see that belt of woods? the stream—you can almost see the line of bushes, even amongst the other trees which mark its course—which divides the principality from us runs through them. It is too dark now to see, but in the daylight you could distinguish the roof of a house just above the trees; that is the first Welsh house, although a Welshman does not live in it."

"Yes, I think I noticed it the other morning." The place where he was standing was near the one

where he and his friend had first found Lilian. He did not particularize the day, lest she should guess he had seen something else besides the house and the view.

"How like the shadow was a little while ago on the hill-side to a giant lying asleep; one could almost imagine he had come out of those castle-like clouds which floated over his head. I thought them more like mountains," said Mr. Beachwood, "with mist caps on them. But I suppose one's fancy can make them take any shape. They are unreal enough tissue to fashion into anything. But do you know, Lily, it is half-past nine? Nay,"—looking again at his watch—"it is nearly a quarter to ten. We must say good-night, Mr. Beresford, unless you will come in and have a glass of wine?"

It was a courteous offer, and nothing more. The young man took it to be such and declined. Mr. and Miss Beachwood wished him a warm good-night, and then turned back the way they had come. They both liked him; the Rector much better than he had liked him before. They had almost reached the first hedge when Walter Beresford was startled by hearing a half-suppressed cry. He had turned away; he now turned back and ran towards his late companions. Mr. Beachwood was lying on the ground; his daughter had half-fallen, half-knelt on the grass by his side. In a second Walter Beresford had reached them. He put his hand on the old man's heart. He was alive. Lilian glanced at him with blanched face and set lips.

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soothingly, as he would have done to one of his sisters: "Is there any water near?"

Lilian shook her head. "No nearer than the house."

He was just going to fetch some when the Rector showed signs of reviving. Luckily Lilian had a smelling-bottle with her, one end of which was filled with salts, the other with *eau de Cologne.* A few drops of the latter on his forehead, behind his ears, and beneath his nostrils, revived him. He sat up for a little while without speaking. Then he seemed to gather his faculties together, thanked the young man, and turning to his daughter with what was intended to be a reassuring smile, he said, "I am afraid, Lily, I have overdone it to-day. You see old people must not get fancying themselves young, or they will come to grief."

"Do you think you are able to walk, sir, with the help of my arm? I am afraid there is a heavy dew on the grass to-night," said the younger clergyman, anxiously.

After a little steadying the Rector walked more easily, but it seemed a long way home to them all. The lights looked cheery as they passed the wicket-gate.

"You must trust your services to me to-morrow, sir."

"Yes, thank you, I suppose I must; I am very thankful they will be in such good hands." The old man had evidently abandoned the theory of the views, at any rate for the present.

As they entered the hall, Walter Beresford said: "You must let me fetch the doctor; I know exactly

where he lives. Do not be frightened ; trust in God. His help is always at hand and is always strong ; man can be at best but weak."

Lilian only pressed his hand and said, "Thank you," but they seemed very near together, just then. Mrs. Beachwood came out into the hall ; of course she was startled, but she did not seem quite so frightened as the young clergyman had expected. Perhaps it was because she had not seen her husband at first, when he looked so white—now he had partially regained his colour—perhaps because she might have seen him in something like it before. She thanked the young man for his very helpful aid most warmly, and accepted his offer of fetching the village chirurgeon, very gratefully. The boy slept out, and she could not send one female servant alone at night. It is a question whether any one of them would have gone, especially with their nerves unstrung by their master's sudden illness. The doctor lived a little way up a lane off the main street of Misterton. Walter Beresford reached his house in about ten minutes. The doctor had just come in, and was inspecting the groom bedding down the horse he had just driven for the night. Directly he heard what was the matter, and where he was wanted, he came out of the stable, saying it would be quickest to walk. Then he went into the house, told his wife where he was going, and that probably he should sleep at the Rectory, and they, indefinitely, must send for him from there if he was wanted.

Bad grammar ; but doctors may, more than any men, be excused if they do not stop in order to pick

and choose their words. Then they were off. Walter Beresford thought he could walk until he raced by the side of Dr. Jones—not a thin man either—as he said to himself. He was not sorry when they reached their destination.

The doctor's verdict was soon pronounced; at any rate, such as he chose to furnish them with. "Nothing serious; soon be all right again. Nothing but rest. They must put him up between dry sheets, and he would stop all night. Just so that the women should not be frightened in case the faintness came on again. Not that he thought it would; but it was better to be on the safe side.

The young clergyman wished the ladies good-night. He supposed he could be of no further service to them now that the doctor was there. Mrs. Beachwood and Lilian wished him a very warm good-night, saying they were sure the Rector would have liked to have seen him again, and thanked him in person; but Doctor Jones had pronounced absolute quiet strictly necessary, and he had now fallen into a dozing state. Lilian was inclined to be tearful; the shock to her nerves had been great. It is astonishing how events can do more in a few hours to bring people together, and rob them of all feeling of strangeness or distance, far more than the intercourse of months or even years.

Had any one of these three reflected that a week, nay, four days ago, they did not even know each other's names, they would hardly have believed it.

It was between half-past eleven and a quarter to

twelve when at last Walter Beresford turned from the Rectory door to pursue his journey home. The moon was just emerging from its first quarter. Everything seemed strangely hushed and still in the dim light.

## CHAPTER XI.

### "MOONLIGHT."

MRS. BEACHWOOD and Lilian turned into the house together and fastened the door; latterly there had been several burglaries at the Vicarage and Rectory houses in the immediate neighbourhood, and they had thought it wise to increase their precautions. In addition, therefore, to the lock and two bolts, a bell had been hung at night close to the lock, so as to ring at the slightest movement of the door. Two nights before the whole household had been alarmed by the distinct tinkling of this bell, but on a search being made nothing had transpired. It was, however, the easiest matter in the world for any one seeking to rob the house to conceal himself in the shrubbery, which afforded sufficient cover on three sides.

"How kind Mr. Beresford has been, mother. How lucky he happened to be near when dear father fainted. I am sure I don't know what I should have done alone on the Ridge Brow without him."

"Yes, my dear, we ought to be most thankful not only for that, but that father's duty can be taken so easily. He certainly is a most perfect gentleman; I am only sorry to encroach on his holiday. I suppose your father has overdone it in the heat the last

day or two. He forgets he is getting older. We must take more care of him, Lily, and not let him have his own way so much any longer."

"I don't like to think of dear father as old," said Lily; "besides, he isn't, you know. He is quite young beside Mr. Ellis of Progmore; and then look what an age Sir Lionel's father lived to be." Lilian blushed. It was the first time that name had passed between them since the talk in the conservatory. It came out inadvertently now.

"Now, Lily dear, kiss me and say good-night, or else you will be a veritable white lily to-morrow morning."

"Good-night, dear, dearest mother."

"Good-night, my own child," and then they parted.

Lilian did not go directly to bed; she uncoiled her hair and let it hang down her back, put on a light dressing-wrap, and leant out of the window. As she did so she fancied she heard a cry; she listened eagerly, but all was silent. Her own heart beat violently, but all nature around her seemed wondrous still. In a few minutes she convinced herself that either her nerves, unstrung by the occurrences through which she had just passed, had played her false and excited her imagination; or that the noise she fancied she heard must have proceeded from some animal or bird which preyed on its victims at night. It carried her thoughts back to the time when as a little one she had been lying in her little cot in the darkness one winter's evening, and had been terribly startled and frightened by a piercing cry coming from the darkness outside. How, when

her mother came up to bed, she was so frightened and crying so bitterly that she had to be taken from her little cot to her mother's bed to sleep there. The next morning they had found the dead body of a favourite fowl with its head completely eaten off, probably by a rat. How still the evening, or rather the night, was now; the soft scent of the sweet briar seemed to fill the whole air! On one side of her window was a pear-tree trained against the wall, and two or three of the fruit were poking their noses in at the window in what would have been a tempting manner had they been riper and larger; on the other side was a magnificent *gloire de Dijon* rose, full of flower, and redolent with the very essence of the scent of a freshly-opened tea chest. How soft and tranquil, too, the moon looked! One could hardly believe that its spotless quiet purity had ever seen any wrong done, or evil deed committed throughout its dominion. It must have been an age wanting in fine feeling and poetical unction which christened burglars and highwaymen myrmidons of the moon. Lilian enjoyed the soft air fanning her temples and rippling her hair, and breathing on her with its gentle breath. She was suffering from the reaction of over-taxed feeling, and the tension of necessary keeping up; and although she fully rested on and believed in Dr. Jones's words, still there was a vague feeling of weight, mental and a little physical, and the foreshadowing of more trouble to come; her frame, too, was pleasantly weary after the tennis. She felt the need—the true woman's need—of some strong arm to lean upon; some strong brain to think for her; some strong hand to lead her when the way

was difficult; some firm, trusty support when she was weary. She had felt what it was to have that to-night for the first time in her life. And it created a want ever after. She repeated to herself over and over again, "Oh, that our boy had not died! Oh, for an elder brother!" She would not let herself think it was anything else she wanted; and when Sir Lionel obtruded himself on her thoughts she resolutely thrust him on one side; and yet he was her best friend in the world—a real friend, in the only true sense of the word; and at one time she would have gone to him for anything; and had he not promised to be her friend—how he had longed to be something more God only knew—unto her life's end? Oh, what a strange web is that of human life! How truly has it been likened to a sea—dark, abyssmal, unknown, unfathomable, mysterious—with many a shoal, many a hidden reef, many a dangerous rock and whirl and eddy; sometimes bright with sunshine, reflecting back the joy of the sky on its smiling surface—sometimes so dark, so lowering, we shrink back from beholding it. Yes, life is very like the sea. The clock had struck twelve. The sabbath had begun. They are to be pitied who have lost the meaning of the word, as they tell me it is lost in the great world; who know not what it is to have a day of rest, of peace, of still quiet.

Lilian always enjoyed her Sunday. She liked her class of village maidens in the afternoon, and her walk afterwards round the lawn with her father and mother. But, above all, she loved the services in the massive church, which was so dear to her, and which had fostered and sheltered her all her life long. She

loved the organ, which she had played now for some two or three years; she loved every word of the time-honoured, time-hallowed, time-consecrated prayers, heavy with the weight of giving expression to the wants, the hopes, the sorrows, and the joys of many generations. They seemed so appropriate there in that church which had stood there so long, and which reared its head towards Heaven, and yet buried its foundations deep down in the earth—just as the prayers seemed to do; and which had gathered around it the dead, as if even then it would not part with all that was mortal of its earthly charge. She loved, too, the faces of old and young, gentle and simple, who came to worship there; the squires and their wives, who were always very nearly if not quite too late to be included amongst the dearly beloved; the farmers who gathered beforehand around the yew-tree, and the hinds who hung in ungainly but comfortable attitudes round the church porch, each with their hands in their trousers' pockets—those hands which were so useful to them on week days, but which were such a burden on Sundays—and their blade of grass in their mouths. And yet it was all so customary to her that, much as she loved it all, and much as her own life was bound up with it, she had never conned it over beforehand as she did now. Somebody else was to see it; would he see it with her eyes? She forgot to ask herself why this stranger was different to all other strangers.

It was no uncommon thing for tourists, gentlemen fishermen, and antiquaries to worship in Misterton Church, and hitherto they had all come and gone without in the least ruffling the calm serenity of

Lilian's nature. Perhaps, if there had been something striking or remarkable about them, she had cast them a glance or a thought, but that was all.

Sunday was too busy and, withal, too happy a day with her for her to waste much time on what did not immediately concern her. How was it the difference in her feelings now did not strike her? Why did not she take herself to task and compel an answer in introspective cross-examination? Could it have been that she was afraid, or had Walter Beresford ceased so entirely to be a stranger to her that she had forgotten he had ever been one? It was a lovely picture framed in that window-setting. The young face, the long silky hair, and the *gloire de Dijon* rosebud stretching itself out from its green bed and looking lovingly in, as if it would lay itself down and pillow its tired head on her cheek. I wonder whether the moon thought so? Who can tell?

## CHAPTER XII.

### A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

I HAVE said that the moon was in her first quarter, very pretty and romantic to look at, but not very useful as far as giving light was concerned. So the young clergyman found it, as he turned homewards. The light of the hall dazzled his eyes, and only made the darkness under the trees beneath which he had to pass all the denser. Twice he deviated from the path and struck first against a tree trunk, and then against a half buried stump. After a minute or two spent in hesitation he turned back to the house, intending to borrow a lantern from Mrs. Beachwood. But on second thought it occurred to him that their nerves, already unstrung and out of proper gear, would be still further disturbed by his unexpected return. He therefore waited in the gravel sweep to let his eyes get accustomed to the light, and then recommenced his endeavour to reach the high road. It was not his nearest way home; that would have led him by the Ridge Brow, the place where he had watched the sunset, and had been joined by the Rector and his daughter. It would have been, however, next to impossible for him to have found his way to Bickley Cottage by that road by night; and it also might well be questioned

whether the high road, from its better condition and absence of steep ascents and abrupt descents, was not, as the country people phrased it, "sooner" at all times. This time he found his way more easily, and with scarcely a mistake or deviation reached the gate through which only that very afternoon he and his friend had passed almost as strangers. He could hardly believe it now that it was only a few short hours ago. So much not only of events—they are of minor importance—but of feeling and thought-action had been compressed into the time, that it seemed to represent a period almost beyond compilation. He could scarcely understand why the feeling of sympathy and compassion with the Rector and Mrs. Beachwood should be so deep—deeper almost than the occasion seemed to warrant.

As a clergyman he had been brought, by the performance of the duties of his profession, into constant contact with troubles of mind, body, and estate; and at all times had his sympathy gone out to the suffering. What clergyman can hope for success in that most important portion of his duty, house-to-house visitation, who has not this sympathy, feeling—call it what you will—which arises from an intuitive perception of, and participation in, others' weal and woe? It gives warmth to his words, sympathy to his every look, and fervour to his prayers.

All this Walter Beresford carried with him into his daily life at Atterley Edge. And yet he could not but feel and recognize that it was an undue and unusual quantity of this feeling that he was bestowing on Mr. and Mrs. Beachwood—and, shall I add, on Lilian?—whose trouble might only be a light and

passing one after all. And yet for all that it seemed to grow upon him, rather than diminish. When he had passed through the gate nearest to the high road, he could not help turning round to look at the church ; and as he did so the solemnity of the scene struck him with a feeling of intense reality. I have said that it stood on a mound rising upon all sides, and seeming to rule the village at its feet, the more distant fields, and the country beyond.

It was distinct now above him in the faint moonlight, and yet dim ; solid, and yet shadowy ; some of the gravestones round it stood out white and new, almost ghostlike from their vivid contrast to the time-darkened monuments around them. The illusion was rendered all the more probable and startling from the fact that the white ones were mainly perpendicular, the dark ones horizontal.

The scene, as he saw it then, never afterwards passed away from his mind and memory. The old church and the silent moonlight, and the white gravestones, and the scent of some hidden-away roses, all seemed intertwined with some inner change in that life which we live apart and alone, and which differs from our outer life of action and movement, and affect us far more deeply and lastingly ; so intertwined that the one ever recalled the other, and could never afterwards be wholly separated and dissociated. A few minutes' pause, and then he turned resolutely away. Pshaw ! Where had his thoughts gone to—building castles in the air, at twelve o'clock at night ? " Standing on the bridge at midnight and shedding tears in the river only to hear them plash ; or composing elegies in country churchyards amongst

owls—whose society no decent person keeps, as they are well known to be most dissipated birds—may be all very well for poets. All well-conducted and sober-minded persons ought to be in bed two hours ago, even if they don't emulate the sensible habits of those grand old Normans, who wore such big armour, and swore such big oaths, and go to bed at the curfew." So, giving himself a vigorous mental shake, the Reverend Walter Beresford turned in the direction of home. The result of the shake was that his thoughts were diverted into a direction they ought to have gone in long ago. The existence of Master Raymond Winslow had never recurred to him before. It had never occurred to him that he had left his *fidus Achates* kicking his heels at the cottage—he hardly now liked to think how many hours ago—to go out for half an hour to see the sunset.

And, although he was no chicken, and his friend not in the least of the anxious sort, still he had certainly been out an unconscionable time in a strange country. As these thoughts passed through his mind, his already quick walk developed into what was very nearly a run. He had not, however, gone very far—keeping to the smooth turf, as it was easier running-ground, which stretched on each side of the road—before he was brought to a sudden stand.

The highway led for some distance past a few cottages at right angles to the Vicarage gates. It was, in fact, a continuation of the main village street. After a little while there came a place where three roads met, one being only a country bridle-path leading to some fields. The one he had to follow turned sharp round to the right towards Bickley;

passing in its way under the hill, upon which the Rectory was built, although at some distance from it. He had only gone about fifty yards round the corner when he was suddenly stopped by hearing voices. There is something which intuitively warns us when men's tongues are muffled—when they are the accompaniment of deeds that will not bear daylight upon them. Walter Beresford felt assured that something was up which ought not to be up, that he had come upon something which was being done under the veil of secrecy. He was a man of no small nerve, but he felt his heart beat as the sounds struck upon his ear. Before him was a high ox fence, some six feet high, perhaps, and beyond were apparently some stacks standing in the open field. He knelt down on the ground and tried to peer through the hedge.

All was dark beyond, and for a moment the muttered voices, too, were quiet. He applied his ear close to the fence and listened. He fancied he heard a rustling in the grass. His thoughts turned to poachers; they seemed the most likely gentlemen to be abroad at that hour of the night; but a little reflection reminded him that there was no cover for some distance, and therefore there could be little likelihood of sufficient game to make the hazard of the enterprise worth while. After a few minutes of almost breathless suspense a voice said, in deep Irish accents, "Stand between me, Mike, and the wind—thank the Lord there isn't much of it!—and hand me the lucifers."

"What could it mean?" he asked himself. Then a sudden inspiration flashed upon him. These men

were going to fire the ricks! Another moment's hesitation, and then he ran down the hedge to find a gate. He had nothing in his hand; what would he not have given for a good stout stick; but if he was to save the ricks there was no time to find one. In less time than it takes to tell he found a gate and vaulted over it. But when he reached the men the spark had been safely applied to the dry hay, and had already caught the lower projecting ends. The two men—for there were apparently only two of them—were standing with their backs to him, looking at their handiwork. Perhaps they were making sure it was really a successful blaze before taking themselves off. The young clergyman thrust himself between them, making them spin with his arms and shoulders in opposite directions, and proceeded to stamp out the just kindled blaze with his feet, forcing the bottom of his foot into the yielding hay. For a moment the men were paralyzed by the suddenness of the attack; then they rushed at Walter Beresford with blind fury. The one who had applied the match either had no stick originally, or had thrown it away, as it hindered him in his work. The other, the shorter and apparently the younger man, was armed with a thick nobbly oaken staff, which had no doubt played its part, perhaps, at Donnybrook Fair many times before. Walter Beresford had expected the onset. He now turned to meet them. The moment's rest their surprise had given him had been well spent in destroying the result of their work. Both men reached him at the same time; the shorter man on his left, the bigger built one on his right. As they came up the former

well-directed blow he had received early in the encounter, related at length in the last chapter.

In a few moments Raymond Winslow had assisted his friend to get up, and placed him to lean against the haystack, which had been the object of attack, for support. The young clergyman was more stunned mentally than physically, and a few moments in the cool night air speedily revived him and cleared his head.

As soon as Walter Beresford could trust his feet and head to perform their respective duties, the young men went together to inspect—as far as the dim light permitted—their prisoner. His groaning showed that there was mischief somewhere, and a little groping demonstrated the locality of the wound.

Raymond Winslow was too much of a traveller not to have some rather, it must be confessed, rough-and-ready surgery about him; and in a little while he had done all that could be done on the spot. The noise of the conflict, and, in particular, the shout the wounded man had given when he was struck, which was probably the sound which had reached the ears of Miss Beachwood, had been heard in the cottages, which, I have already said, were just round the angle of the road. The men, having hurried into their garments, now came up, with mouths wide open, at the unaccustomed scene. Walter Beresford related for their benefit, and that of his friend, what had happened, his delay at the Rectory owing to Mr. Beachwood's illness, his journey for the Doctor, and the exciting occurrences on the way home. One of the labourers supplied the reason for the act. The stacks, of last year's hay, were the property of Farmer Waller, who had employed the two Irishmen

as job labourers for the hay and corn harvests, or any odd hoeing work that might require to be done. The last few days, however, they had taken to drinking, had left their work undone, and had also been very rude to the farmer's wife. Whereupon Mr. Waller had sent them about their business as a couple of lazy, good-for-nothing, worthless, Irish loons; remarking, rather unnecessarily, that Irishmen, he believed, were neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. To-night's scene was evidently the climax of the story; and had it not been for the chapter of accidents which had brought the young clergyman to the spot, and his subsequent courageous action, doubtless the farmer would have suffered severely for his views, or, at any rate, the expression of them, concerning the ethics of races.

The labourers soon placed Mike on a gate; and he was finally left to the tender mercies of the constable, and Dr. Jones's assistant. His friend joined him in the village lock-up next day; and on the evidence, mainly of the young clergyman, they were eventually sentenced, the elder to five years, and the younger to three—no doubt the broken collar-bone pleading powerfully for extenuation of sentence. Raymond Winslow's personal account of his part of the matter was as follows. He had come to the conclusion that his friend had slipped into the Rectory, having, as he probably thought—although he discreetly kept it to himself—been caught by the Rector hovering near, and been invited indoors. About a quarter to twelve he had started from the cottage, thinking Walter Beresford must be coming home before midnight, and, sooth to say, having got

uncommonly tired of his own company. As he was sauntering along with his hands in his coat-pockets, smoking the pipe which in the country scarcely ever left his lips out of doors, he saw a man vault over a gate at some distance from him, the figure as it did so looming up against the sky-line. This roused him to action; and he ran along and followed suit, thinking, as he phrased it, "that the man in front was up to no good." But, before he had reached the gate, enough seconds had elapsed to allow of the events recorded above to take place. As it was, he leapt the gate just at the slightly critical moment for his friend, when he fell a victim to the superior weight of his big assailant. In jumping the gate, however, Raymond Winslow's foot struck the top; and the sound attracting the Irishman's attention, the latter had made off as fast as he could go, leaving Winslow master of the situation without a combat.

"Well, old friend, I told you I came here for rest," said Walter Beresford, as they sat talking over the exciting events of the night before separating for sleep; "but, certainly, this does not look much like quiet and rest at present. Here I am in for the old gentleman's duty to-morrow."

"This morning, you mean."

"Well, this morning, or to-day rather; and certainly this last affair has not the most soothing effect on one's head, body, or nerves, and we are not at the end of the first week yet."

"They say change of occupation is rest; so, as I don't suppose you indulge in many midnight adventures of this kind at Atterley Edge, evidently

you have chosen the most complete rest possible. I thought when I first came up—and the big ruffian had just about settled you—that it looked more like quietus than rest, and that the popular curate seemed to stand a very poor chance of ever going home to tell the tale."

"Yes; I have not forgotten that I have to thank you for your timely help in my hour of need; and you know me too well, dear old fellow, not to be sure that I have not failed to remember who it was who sent you just when you were wanted." Walter Beresford spoke these words in a more serious tone than the one he had used before.

"Well, I certainly did not do anything personally except jump a rather high gate, and I shall be happy to do the same again for you at any time; but I hope, both for your sake and mine, that you will not choose the middle of the day in this weather for any exploits needing such extreme assistance; I should not take it kindly if you did." Walter Beresford knew his man, and that it was impossible to say more to him after that.

It was not the first time that they had been put into deadly peril together; but few words had ever passed between them on the subject. Words, after all, must be but weak by the side of deeds; and their friendship was of the sterner stuff, which was built on the latter, not the former.

"Well, my friend, I go to bed."

"And I." And so they parted. Perhaps the farewell shake was more expressive, and the grip of those two hands rather closer than before, but that was all.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### EGO, I.

I HAVE hitherto with commendable modesty kept myself out of this veritable history At least, I hope modesty has been the reason; but so complex is human nature, and so often what appears to be pure gold is only tinsel on nearer view; or, to drop metaphor, so often behind the higher motive lurks the lower and baser acting as the real wire-puller, that I do not like to speak positively. I had hoped that the modesty aforesaid would have kept me out of my story altogether; but a letter from my friend Raymond Winslow thrusts me into action, and so into the story.

Before you read the letter—for I intend to keep nothing back—you must, perforce, hear something of me. I believe there is a certain character in a good old book, whose name I have never been able to pronounce, who was dropped by his nurse in his infancy, and never quite regained the use of his feet. The same fate happened to me before I can remember anything, and I have been a cripple, or thereabouts, ever since. The consequence has been that I was an old man before I was a child; only, instead of growing older, I have steadily grown younger ever since. I suppose it all came about

from the fact that I had nothing to do but look about me; at any rate, very early I had so studied character that a knowledge of human nature being at the bottom of all wisdom but the very best, I was reckoned an old head almost before I was a young one. My father — oh, how I reverenced him! — how tender he was over me! Women can be very tender, thank God, but how great is the tenderness of a tender man!

My father would have had me stay at home all my life, but I was determined to go to school like other boys. So, as the next best thing, he sent me where his near neighbour and close crony Roger Winslow sent his son—already almost a man in strength, though a boy in years—and told the latter he would have to answer to him, John Walker, how he took care of his boy Morrice. "Morrice," you will say, "rather an odd Christian name!" Yes, it was my mother's surname; my mother whom I have never known; she died when I was born. It is curious the strange relationship which grew up from that time between Raymond Winslow and myself. He was strength, legs, power physical for me; I, head, and power mental for him. Every one called him "Ray," I with more reason than any one else, for he was the concentration of light to me. He called me "Mentor." I wrote his verses, helped him with his translation, and at college got him through little-go, general, and finally, by dint of much trouble, through the senate house. And he—he did everything for me. He, who would take no trouble for anything or anybody else, much more for himself, thought nothing enough that he could do for me. I believe,

if he could have had his way, I should never have walked at all; but I was determined to use my crutch, upon which I could go well enough; and I did. On warm days he would take me out when he was going to play cricket, and place me in a warm nook, sufficiently far off not to be hurt by a chance hit, and yet sufficiently near to see and take an interest in the game. I took a passionate interest in all sports. I wonder whether all cripples do. I suppose one generally craves for pleasures from which we are debarred. At college he used to row me often on bright afternoons, especially during the autumn and spring terms—October and Lent as they are called at the "Varsity"—up the so-called Freshman's river, while I held the rudder lines. He always used to joke and say that with Mentor steering he could not go far wrong. Walter Beresford was all in the thick of the life around him, rowing in the boat—the college boat I mean—or in the May term on the cricket-ground; and at the same time working like a horse, reading his eight and nine hours a day as his maximum, and five as his minimum. Nevertheless he called me Mentor, too; and to me he became dearer year by year, as I planned out for him a great future at the Bar and on the bench. Somehow some men seem marked out to win—he was one of them.

The time came when we three had to separate. Life lay before us. Six months afterwards I read that Walter Beresford had been ordained and licensed to the curacy of Atterley Edge. Some three months afterwards I went to stay with him there, but of the reason for this great change in his

life I learnt but little. He had been very ill, dangerously ill, far off in the Pyrenees, in the early spring; he had come home and had prepared himself for ordination, and had been ordained. This was all I knew; but seeing him there in the midst of his work I could not fail to mark a difference in him, a difference sharply defined, and yet hardly capable of being put down on paper, and represented by any figure of speech. Before, his rare energy had been here, there, and everywhere; now it seemed to have gained concentration. He was as a man who had found his life's work, and was doing it, making many mistakes, receiving some hard knocks, but who was after all a champion of right, and of right which knew it must win, though fighting against the combination of both wrong and might. My first feeling on hearing that he had gone into the Church had been that of keen disappointment. What had the Church got to offer him—for him who could have done anything—him, for whom I had mapped out a career not with an illusory brush, but which I knew was within his reach—for him, with his talents and his energies—a mere pittance and hard work?

And yet, in spite of myself, I had to confess there, at Atterley Edge, that I was wrong and he was right. I could not help reading the hard logic of fact everywhere; I read it in the crowded aisles of the church. I read it in the hard-set faces of the mechanics and artisans, who would hear him when they would hear no one else. I read it in the faces of the children as they beamed upon him as he passed. But I think one thing told it me more than all else besides. He had a class of boys on a Sun-

day afternoon, but amongst them came three men—two gentle of face and bearing, the third rough, shaggy, bull-necked, as complete a contrast as was possible to the other two. He held this class in his own room. One day I stood by the gate and saw them pass out. The last to go was our bull-necked friend. I am afraid I rather shrank from him. He did not seem to notice it, but was passing out. Suddenly, without any warning, he turned sharp round and said,—

"You be Maister Beresford's crony, I hears. Well, look ye, I were Ben Allen the prize-fighter, and, though I says it, the worst man in all Atterley. What I am now I hardly knows, but if Maister Beresford ever wants for a road I'll lie me down and he shall walk over me. And so do 'ee tell 'un."

When I met Walter Beresford I told him what Mr. Benjamin Allen had said. "This sort of work will never get you a bishopric," I said, to which he only replied, with a half smile,—

"No, I dare say not."

## CHAPTER XV.

### MISS WYNCOMBE.

"IT always rains at the lakes," I have heard people say. Well, I suppose we do get our share of the attentions of nature in that respect. But when the sunshine does come, it seems to drive away all recollection of the dull days indoors, and the heavy, damp mist hiding the mountains, and the sweeping of the wind over the lake. I know tourists despise Windermere, and always pass on to the farther meres, and yet to me it has always had new beauties day by day, ever since I can remember anything. When I am at home alone, and my father away on his business, or out riding over the estate—a great part of which he farms himself—I go down to the great lake side, and there I sit beneath some trees which have often sheltered Ray Winslow's clothes when he has been bathing, and read or dream as the mood suits me. The view never changes; there are always the same small rowing-boats and the same broad expanse of water; and the same steamers with their tiny paddles, which try to look so important, plying between Bowness and Ambleside, and beyond is the Lancashire shore, bleak and mountainous.

And yet somehow I don't seem to tire of it; only

now and again, when I have been reading about some pet exploit or heroic deed of some hero of romance to whom I am attached, sometimes I feel how very purposeless and useless my own life is; and how much I should like to do if I could in the great world. But when the tired feeling comes on then I am very glad for my father to come down for me, walking, to give me his arm and support me by his strength, or to place me, riding, as comfortably as possible, with a cushion at my back in the little pony trap, by his side. You will think, perhaps, that with so much time on my hands and so much talk about my reading that I must devour most of the new books when they come out. Well, I do read a good many, but not by any manner of means so many as I might; for somehow I like my old ones best, and I never tire of reading them over and over again. You would find, if you looked through my library—to which my father always adds those I like best, out of the number we have monthly from Mudie—you would find certain ones with much worse binding probably, but nevertheless with many a use-mark upon them, and you would know that these are my friends. But I might go on talking about myself for ever and for aye, and thoroughly weary you out, only here beside me lies the Ray's letter; and this, perforce, reminds me what I was going to tell you. I will give it to you *verbatim:*

"My dearest Mentor,

"Come to us at once. We want you. That is, I want you, and I am sure so would Walter Beresford, if he had only time to think about you. You will

think this rather startling after the last letter I wrote you, telling you I had decided to accept our reverend friend's offer and come here; but the fact is things are going from bad to worse. You know our friend, how susceptible he is. At least he would be with the right woman. And here is such a dangerous woman. And—well, I am afraid for Walter's peace of mind; and you and I know how heavily he would take anything. So you must come and look after him, for you know I cannot. Mind you come at once. At once, mind you.

"Ever yours,

"RAYMOND WINSLOW."

Well, I do wonder what he thinks I can do. Well, I suppose after that peremptory ending, go I must. So I write to Walter Beresford to say that I need a change—I hope that is not a very serious fib—that I am going to invite myself to come and see him; and that he may expect me by such and such a train on Monday. It was Sunday when Raymond Winslow's appeal reached me. He must have written off directly after the tennis-party. You may imagine where my thoughts were as I travelled down to Bickley. How carefully had the dear father seen me into the train at Lancaster, my first change; and how tenderly he had said good-bye. Somehow his love for me always seemed rather that of a strong man to and over weak woman than that of father to son. Perhaps he saw something of his dead wife in me—dead so long ago, and yet ever living to him in his reverent, faithful love. John Walker was not of the stuff that makes husbands of successive wives.

Whether his nature gained by that or not I cannot say. I think it would have killed me for some one else to come in and reign, where I should always have felt, but never seen, that she used to reign. Her work-box and keys in other hands; his arms round another. I think, if the first love be true, it must be always of a vicarious love after that.

And so, perhaps, was John Walker's to his son Morrice. But to-day my thoughts hardly went to him at all. They were all before me. I had had a foreboding when the Bickley expedition was planned —a foreboding of some lurking sediment of ill at the bottom of what seemed a bright enough cup, full up to the brim of pleasure. I am one of those people who believe in forebodings and portents. All morbid people do; and I am very morbid. And now here was a verification even earlier than I could have expected. I think I have told you Walter Beresford could never marry on his present means; and in the Church what hope is there of speedy advance to ease or opulence? The best workers and the most brilliant thinkers and writers may hope for that when the time has passed when they might mean enjoyment and stimulus. And so I could only see before him—mind you, I never doubted his power to win a princess if he chose—I could only see the prospect of a long engagement; and the very thought sickened me. I have always thought them hateful, wearisome, weighing you down; taking the brightness out of a man's life, and the buoyancy out of his step, and the colour out of a girl's cheek; and in the end disappointment. I have seen it so many times.

"Why, this ought to be Misterton. What a lovely day it has been!" remarks my *vis-à-vis.* "Can you tell me what station this is?"

"Yes, I think it is Misterton," I reply.

"Ah! my destination."

"And mine." We are gliding in as she speaks. I glance at my fellow-traveller with much more interest. She has travelled opposite to me ever since I changed into this carriage some eight stations back, and yet I have hardly looked at her. Now I come to look at her, I see she is worth looking at. Above the middle height, tall, very dark, shining black eyes, straight nose, rather long perhaps, mobile mouth, rather scornful lips, fine graceful figure. I wonder whether you and I are going to meet in the battle of life? If so, unknown one, I hope we may be on the same side. Better be your friend than your enemy. We both get out. Both Raymond Winslow and Walter Beresford had come to the station to meet me. The latter, always ready, was at the carriage door first. He was just going to help me out when he caught sight of my companion. He started, and then flushed. The young lady did not seem nearly so surprised. A strange smile passed, not over her face, but across her mouth. How lovely, and yet how hard!

"How do you do, Mr. Beresford? I presume you have not come to meet me?"

"No, Miss Wyncombe, this is certainly an unexpected pleasure." We were all out on the platform by this time. "May I ask where you are going to stay?"

"I am going to pay a long-promised visit to some

old friends of my father's. I hardly know them. They invite me, I suppose for the sake of 'auld lang syne,' every year. Their name is Beachwood, and they live at Misterton Rectory."

Walter introduces his friends, and then hands her into the pony trap, which has come for her.

"Who is your friend, Walter?"

"Oh, only my Rector's daughter from Atterley."

As we turn into the cottage I hear him say, "Well, I never did! I wonder what, in the name of wonder, brings her here?"

As Raymond Winslow and I sat waiting for dinner soon after my arrival, Walter Beresford being upstairs, the former remarks, not in the most reassuring of tones as far as I am concerned, "The plot thickens, my boy, depend upon it. Well, hang it all, I am glad you are come, at any rate."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A TALK.

AFTER a good night's rest the Rector felt almost himself again, nevertheless he seemed quite satisfied —a very rare thing with him—that another should take his place.

Lilian had spent many quiet half-hours in the church she loved so well, both on week-days and Sundays, but none more restful than those she enjoyed that July day. Mr. Beresford's voice seemed to match the fine old building exactly—deep, clear, resonant. All the lights and shades, the rhythm and cadence of the prayers found fullest expression; but in the sermon it was that Lilian found something wholly new to her. I think that the memory of Walter Beresford in the pulpit that Sunday morning never wholly passed away from her. His text was one she had read and re-read many times; but now it came to her as something new, something she had never heard before. It was this: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this—to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The religion Walter Beresford preached you felt, as he preached, was the religion of his life. It was that of a man who had gone

out into the busy world and mixed with his fellows; who had felt their pulse-throbs; who had seen them in misery, and helplessness, and sin, and then had helped them—ay, and who believed in them, and would believe in them to the very last. And as he spoke Lilian's old vision came back to her of work in the great world, only somehow over the old vision had come the glamour of something new.

She felt that there ought to be some foundation other and deeper for her work than unsatisfied craving, or a desire to try her own strength in the race which others ran—something more than discontent with the past to give direction and hope and stimulus for the future. Walter Beresford did not cast any such tempting bait before his hearers as to suggest to them that the toil was scanty and the work easy. He told them plainly that it required a brave heart and a willing spirit, and that even then there would be moments when the heart was heavy and the spirit bowed down, under a load of disappointment, and doubt, and fear. But you felt as he spoke that you had your work to do, and that as your day so your strength should be. It was impossible for the preacher to know that he was striking a note of sympathy, at any rate, in one breast in that church. It was not till long afterwards that he learnt how deep down had his words penetrated; and then he knew that they were not his words that he had spoken when he drew, as it were, a bow at a venture.

The young men dined at the Rectory, and after dinner the two ladies and two gentlemen walked in the garden; only somehow, after a few minutes, four

proved too many, so Raymond Winslow took charge of Mrs. Beresford, and Walter and Lilian walked about and talked. They discussed many subjects, and gradually, as they did so, the barriers of restraint were broken down, and the talk grew—as it always will grow if this be the case—more personal.

Lilian talked more freely than she had ever done before to any one outside the home circle of her past; of her dead brother, and of the village life, and the tiny world which was almost all the world she knew. And the young man marvelled, and was pleased with something so totally different from all that he was accustomed to meet with.

"So you cannot imagine what my life is?" he said. "No, I suppose it is all very different. At present it seems to me the only life. When I first went to Atterley Edge the place certainly did seem rather grimy and smoky, and the people a trifle rough and uncouth. I had a rebuff at almost the first house I went to. I was taking the street, house by house, and at the second cottage I called at the door was opened by a fierce-looking Irishwoman, who began by asking me 'what was my business?' adding, 'that she would trouble me if I had come to look after her to mind my own business instead of hers.' She is, however, a very good friend to me now."

"I suppose it all seems to bear quite a new aspect, now that you have made it your own by hard work in it?"

"Yes. Houses and streets look very different when you have learnt to associate them not so much with their outward adorning as with the human

faces and lives you have learnt to look for inside. And gradually one gets to like those best, not where the blinds are smartest and the doorsteps cleanest, as where diligent visiting, hearty sympathy in sorrow and trouble, and especially sick visiting, have made you a real family friend."

"Do you know I think your life must be a very happy one—the happiest possible. It is just what I have always longed for, to be useful; and it seems almost as if I never should be to any one: certainly, I never have been. I think men are much more fortunate than women; they can pick and choose, and go out and rub shoulder to shoulder with the busy world, and no one thinks they are doing wrong; whereas women mustn't do this, and mustn't do that, and people talk as if marriage were the aim and end of every woman's life. I hate the very name of it!"

Lilian had almost forgotten to whom she was speaking. It was so pleasant—a very rare pleasure—to find a willing listener who could understand her, and whom she could talk to without hurting his feelings by showing her restiveness beneath the galling fetters of her old life. Her father would not have listened to her. To get even on the borderland of such a subject as this only pained her mother to such an extent it was impossible to pursue it. Perhaps the very fact that it had been so long bottled up made it come forth with all the more froth and foam now that it could be safely uncorked and drunk.

A shade or two passed over the young man's face as he listened. He could not tell why, but the words pained him somewhat. Was it that he thought

the fair girl by his side discontented, when she ought to have been satisfied with what most girls would have deemed one of the fairest and happiest lots on earth? Was this the reason, or was it a deeper one? I cannot tell.

They had pursued their walk through the shrubbery, the garden lay behind. As Lilian spoke the last words they were standing beneath the very tree under which Lilian had lain and slept. He remembered it. She little guessed the thoughts which passed through his mind.

Walter Beresford paused a moment before he replied. Perhaps he found it difficult to answer the last part of her speech; at any rate, he only addressed himself to the first.

"Yes, my life is on the whole a happy one—a very happy one. I have plenty of work, and it is work that I really like and enjoy, and for which I think I am, on the whole, suited. I suppose that comes very near the definition of happiness; certainly as you would define it. Neither have I any cares, except those necessary ones attached to my profession—the knowledge that however much one may do there is infinitely more lying outside, which strength and time compel us to leave undone."

"And yet you say 'on the whole.'"

"Well, sometimes I cannot but feel somewhat lonely. I make frivolous pretexts, now and again, in the evening, to call my landlady in, that I may hear the sound of her voice; but she is old and very garrulous, and the remedy is almost worse than the disease. You see, after a hard day's work, one is sometimes too tired to read or even to think. I fancy

sometimes it would be nice to be read to and talked to. Only there is no one to do it. Even the cat is never sociable in an evening. She always sleeps preparatory to a night of music, and refuses to answer to any caresses."

"But can you not go into the Rectory when you want a change, or to some other friend?"

"Yes; but sometimes I am too tired to make myself agreeable; and no one but your nearest and dearest cares to have anything to do with you when you are disagreeable."

They had reached the house, and were joined by the other two, who had been indoors with the Rector, and had come out to look for them. Tea was ready. No answer was given, or, in fact, possible. Both remarked how quickly the afternoon had passed away.

That night, during the service, when the chant ought to have been struck up after the first lesson, no organ made itself heard. When it did begin it commenced with a jerk and a few hurried notes. The choir-master remarked that "it was all along o' that plaguey blower, whom he believed to have been asleep." Of course, it could not have been Lilian, who was far away, and never heard either the first lesson or its formal close.

Strange that during the afternoon she had never even mentioned that his Rector's daughter was coming to stay with her on the morrow.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### NEWS FROM ABROAD.

ALL Tuesday I lay on the sofa and rested. A day's travel was a great event in my life, and always left me the whole of the next day on my back. Walter read me the greater part of the *Saturday Review* in the morning; it is a favourite paper with both of us. It had been sent to him by post by an old college friend—a mutual friend. In the afternoon I slept, and when I awoke I pondered. The result of my pondering was that I was engaged in that unprofitable pastime—a wild-goose chase. What could I do in the matter, now I had come? What can No. 3 or 4 or 5 ever do in certain games which only two can play? I had been pretty sure of this before I came, but things always look more plausible at a distance.

It is when you are on the scene of action, then it is that you can see the serried masses of the enemy, and can tell of what sort of stuff his battalions are made. I had not yet seen the young lady, but the appearance of the gentleman was far from reassuring. Raymond Winslow had told me all about Sunday afternoon, and you may be sure I had used pretty strong language. "Fancy his leaving them together, when he ought to have stuck to them like a leech,

a whole afternoon! It was madness. What could be done after that, I should like to know?" "Yes, he quite agreed with me, only he couldn't help it. They were yards away before he knew it; and then politeness forbade his leaving the old lady. Besides, she wanted a shawl, and he had to fetch it, and by that time the thing was hopeless. They had got so thick, they would have asked him his business if he had gone up to them." I could only laugh, although I really was very cross. He seemed so very contrite; and really it was a difficult situation. The only thing that reassured me was that there seemed nothing to indicate any particular change in the victim himself. I had always understood that people in love were fanciful about their eating; pecked at one thing after another, and did nothing well. I believed it was almost an axiom that they never ate beefsteak, and I had seen Walter Beresford make a considerable inroad into one that very morning. Nothing had disturbed the equanimity of his appetite at present, at any rate. There was only one thing which caused me any uneasiness, he was decidedly restless. I tried, however, to think that, to a man of active disposition and regular habits, absence from his usual occupations might easily bring this about without any further ulterior cause.

As I was thus pondering, Beresford came in with a letter in his hand—evidently a very long letter—crossed, woman-like, from top to bottom.

"I have got a letter from my mother, Mentor."

"Oh! how is she? I do hope better."

"Yes, thank you; by what she says she seems much better. Her letter is, however, mainly taken

up with rather an odd thing which has happened. Here, read it for yourself. It begins there :—

"You will be surprised to hear my news, dear Walter. Yesterday, in the afternoon, as I was sitting reading, there was a noise as of a horse running away, and considerable shouting below my window. Before I could look out, the carriage—an open one—had met with some obstacle and had overturned. A gentleman and lady who were driving in it were thrown out almost at the door of my lodgings. I hastened down—you may be sure all of a tremble—to see if I could be of any assistance. By the time I had got into the street a surgeon had reached the spot, and was attending to the gentleman. The lady was apparently unhurt, only very much frightened, shaken, and distressed for her son—as he turned out afterwards to be. The surgeon said he thought no bones were broken ; that the patient was in a state of coma through a blow on the back of the head, and that he was also suffering from a strain to one of the sinews of his leg. I at once offered to take him in ; and in a few minutes some men had brought him indoors, and he now lies in my bed. His mother is a charming old lady. Her name is Lady Battersby ; he is Sir Lionel Battersby, and I believe comes from close to where you are staying. It is likely to be rather a long business, but I have insisted on their both taking up their quarters here."

"Well, that certainly is an excitement. Your mother says nothing about how the accident took place. She evidently thinks getting him well the more important matter. Well, I only hope this

unfortunate business will not occasion Mrs. Beresford too much fatigue for her system. I know how kind your mother is, Walter; she would spare no pains or trouble, even at the expense of her own health."

"Well, I hope it will do her no harm. It may do her good—take her out of herself, and give her a new interest. Sir Lionel Battersby—a nice name! I cannot help fancying I have heard some one here mention something about him. I will go and consult Harris." Harris was the old man-servant who had been attached to the cottage for thirty years as gardener, groom, coachman, and general outside factotum.

Harris was soon found. He was busy mowing the grass near the river with a scythe. The old man, though bowed and grizzled, was still strong and sinewy, and could do a day's work against many a younger man—when he chose. He did not always choose.

He touched his hat as Walter Beresford approached. The parson had soon become a favourite with him. His tender, I might almost say affectionate, interest in his rheumatics had quite won the old servant's heart.

"Well, Harris! Warm work to-day out in the sun."

"Yes, master, it be—main warm." Harris's vocabulary was, to say the least, limited. He was likewise slow of speech, except when the second pint of ale at the "Hare and Hounds" had made him slightly quarrelsome. There was a keen look, however, in his grey eyes; and what he did say was generally

considered by the country side to be to the purpose, if not quite oracular.

"Have you seen any trout rising in the stream, or is the day too hot even for them?"

"Well, master, for sure I haven't looked; I be grass-cutting to-day, not 'speerin' for trout."

Walter Beresford now introduced the subject in hand.

"Doesn't Sir Lionel Battersby live somewhere about here?"

"He do, when he's at home."

"Where?"

"Up at th' Grange—Misterton Grange, ye ken. His be main part of the land hereabouts—ay, and as far as ye can see on a clear day. He and the Capting they be'ant first cousins, as they say in these parts."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, they be'ant ower thick. The squoire he do want this bit of land, and the right of the river, and the Capting he won't part at no price."

Then Walter imparted the news of the accident. The old man seemed rather pleased than otherwise; he had given it out as his opinion that no good would come of this going to foreign parts, and he evidently thought the end had justified his predispositions.

Walter Beresford returned to the cottage with a thoughtful step. They always say the world is very small. But this meeting does seem to have happened oddly; I cannot help feeling something will come of it.

If he could have looked into the very cosy bed-

room, in which a certain invalid was lying not on the bed, but on a sofa near the window, by whose side were seated two ladies, he might have had more reason for his thoughts. As Sir Lionel lay there he thought he had rarely seen two finer old ladies. He was not allowed to talk, so he lay and listened and thought the more. He might well be forgiven if he was proud of his stately old mother, but she had met her match in Mrs. Beresford. They both belonged to an old school of gentlewomen which seems to be out of fashion just now. Perhaps, like other old fashions, it may come in again. Mrs. Beresford might be pardoned. She had led the talk round to her son. The fact that he was now staying so near the home of her new friends formed a species of tie between her and her guests. When we are far away from home slight ties assume great additional proportions.

They took great interest in the old lady's recollections of her son's life, especially that relating to his work at Atterley Edge. It is astonishing very often how little country gentlemen know of the inner life of the poor in great cities. Certainly Sir Lionel knew almost as little about it all as Lilian had done. He learnt much, however, in the weeks following the accident; and gradually the name and the personality of Walter Beresford became quite familiar to both mother and son, until they could almost fancy they knew him. Some people may be strangers whom we have seen every day of our lives; and others may, by the power of language and description, become intimate friends before we have ever seen them.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A STRANGER GUEST.

THE Rectors of Atterley Edge and of Misterton had been old college friends; and although all real correspondence had long ceased between them, twice a year there was an exchange of letters, containing invitations which had become from long habit more of a formal custom than anything else. Year by year, at or about midsummer, when the country looks at its brightest, Maud Wyncombe, as representing her father and mother, was invited to Misterton; and year by year at Christmas—there or thereabouts—Lilian Beachwood received an exchange invitation to travel northwards and join the family circle at Atterley. On one side—the latter—it had never been accepted; and on the former only once, some five years back, had Miss Wyncombe spent two nights under the hospitable roof of her father's old friend.

Still the invitations went and came, more because to stop would be an imaginary breaking of old ties and severing of old associations, than from any real belief that either would be induced to do in the present and future other than, with one slight exception, they had done in the past. Considerable

surprise, then, was evoked when Maud Wyncombe wrote on this occasion an apparently frank note to say she was coming. She averred "that of late a tardy repentance had come to her for past sins of omission; that she felt the kindness of her dear friends"—a little gushing, perhaps, considering that she hardly knew them—"had been but cavalierly received, but that she would try to make amends by her good conduct now; and that she was coming to enjoy their sweet country air that she remembered so well"—it had rained the only one whole day she had spent at Misterton, when she was breaking her journey southwards, and she had never been out of doors—"and that she would be with them on Monday to make quite a long stay."

Such was the substance of her letter. It gave considerable surprise to the old people, and not a little to Lilian herself. It seemed such an odd coincidence, too, that her father's curate—and there are curates and curates—should be staying at Bickley, and that Bickley should be so close to Misterton. Of course she might never have heard that he was going to spend his holiday in Glebeshire, and still less at Bickley; she might never have known that Bickley was close to Misterton; and if she had heard it mentioned five years before, she might and probably would have forgotten it. At any rate, to say the least of it, it was singular, and a coincidence. But then every one has met with just such coincidences in his or her life in which there has not been the faintest shadow of an arrangement, and why not in this case? So the old people argued to each other. They began by saying it was strange,

and they ended by saying it was strange, and there they left it.

Lilian said nothing about it one way or the other; only on that Sunday afternoon, somehow either it slipped her memory, or she did not think it of sufficient importance, or some other reason. At any rate, the fact remains that she did not mention to Walter Beresford that his Rector's daughter, Maud Wyncombe, was coming to Misterton on the morrow to stay with them at the Rectory.

Now what recollection had this young lady, then in her teens, left on Lilian's mind? Well, she would fain persuade herself that it was a pleasant one—only she could not. She quite thought it was her own fault. She was no doubt countrified and unused to strangers. Perhaps what seemed to her rather self-assuming ways, and something approaching dangerously near cynicism, was only manner and a different bringing up. There was a good deal of simplicity about Lilian—she thought no evil. It is a rare and wonderful trait in character. It is perhaps less common in woman judging woman, than in man judging man. A true and noble woman is on the whole truer and nobler than a true and noble man. She was God's last and greatest creation. Only, as a compensation, true and noble women are rare; but when found they are a jewel to be sought, to be handled tenderly, to be guarded lovingly; to be reverenced and kept very near the heart. Don't fancy there is any exclusiveness in their setting—these jewels. They are not given to one class, and that one class only. You will find them quite as much in cottage homes as in mansions. Perhaps, if

they do predominate anywhere, it is in that middle class life which is removed on the one side from the degrading bane of undue rank and wealth, and on the other side from the more sordid and coarsening cares of the artisan class. To the upper middle class Lilian Beachwood belonged. I leave you to judge her.

Nothing could look more sweet and pleasant to the eye than the room destined for her guest. So thought Lilian, as she glanced round the room for the last time, as wheels made themselves heard scrunching the gravel. All was white; white curtains to the bed, white curtains of the daintiest sort gracefully draped at the window, and a white rose on the dressing-table, with a spray of green behind to bring it into relief.

The Rector was out on a visit to a sick parishioner at some distance; but Mrs. Beachwood and Lilian met the traveller in the hall, and their greeting was cordial enough to prove that they were fully prepared to do all in their power to make the stranger girl at home. Maud Wyncombe kissed Mrs. Beachwood and then turned to Lilian, paused a moment, during which a rapid glance took in the whole situation, and made a pretty accurate calculation of the fair girl before her; then she kissed Lilian on both cheeks very cordially.

"How well I remember you, dear, only the Lily is longer of stalk and fairer of petal even than I expected;" this was said aloud. The inner comment was, "Even worse than I expected; much too good-looking and simple too, evidently, which is always dangerous. It covers so much."

The mother was not ill-pleased at the rather broad compliment, but Lilian shrank back rather. She was not used to familiarity, still less to remarks on her personal appearance, and something of the old feeling came over her. Life has a good deal of the gladiatorial arena about it. Instinct often tells us of danger long before our physical powers have scented a foe.

"Will you come and take your things off? I am sure you must be both tired and hungry, after your long and tiresome journey. How you ever could have had the courage to come all that way alone I cannot think; but we are very glad you were not afraid, as it gives us the pleasure of having you here again." Lilian was trying to make the *amende honorable* to her guest for the thoughts which had come unbidden into her mind.

In a few minutes they were all seated round the table. The Rector had come in from his walk. He was somewhat grave—the case was worse than he had expected—and a little tired too. He did not like to confess it, but walking tired him of late, especially since his accident—more than it used to do.

Miss Wyncombe rattled on upon her journey, describing her fellow-passengers with considerable humour, from the stout gentleman who went to sleep and nearly fell on top of her, to the young one who wore glasses and kept taking stock of her round the corner of his newspaper, which for half an hour he held upside down, until, to her intense amusement, he discovered the fact, and that she was fully aware of it too, and utterly collapsed into a state of blushing misery.

"The strangest of all my fellow-passengers, a very delicate looking cripple, with a refined face, accompanied me to my journey's end; in fact, got out when I did." As she pronounced the last words she looked full at Lilian, who was sitting opposite to her.

"Why, that must be the friend Mr. Beresford said he was expecting, mother!"

"Oh, so Mr. Beresford has made himself so much at home here that he describes his friends, and tells them whom he expects to come and see him, has he?" Then aloud: "I suppose, as my father's curate met the deformed gentleman at the station, you are referring to him. I knew he was to spend his holiday in Glebeshire; has he come to stay near here, then?"

"Yes, at Bickley, which is the next village; in fact, part of dear father's parish, you know."

"Ah! he is rather a dangerous neighbour for the surrounding young ladies, being very much of a lady-killer, and not over-susceptible himself. I hope he has caused no great commotion at present."

The Rector had not been looking over-pleased during the progress of this speech. He now interposed:

"My dear, I don't like to hear you talk so frivolously about any gentleman, especially a clergyman. Lilian, if your friend is not too tired, she would doubtless like to look round our garden."

"Oh no, I am not a bit tired." And so the two girls went out together. The contrast was as great between them as that between a tulip and a *gloire de Dijon* rose, over which they bent their shapely

heads. Both were fair representatives of two opposite types of beauty.

But the difference did not end there. There are other variations in the human species more important and more distinctive than those of colour and shade and outline.

Maud Wyncombe and Lilian Beachwood were as wide as the poles asunder.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE RECTOR'S DINNER-PARTY.

IT is not often that I venture out to anything like a dinner-party, and yet Thursday evening found us all equipped to dine at the Rectory. The fact was the Rector had called upon me the preceding day, and would take no refusal. We must all come up and dine, quite in a friendly way. The only other guests expected were Mr. Ralph and Lady Fanny Fairlegh, and they were too much at home to matter. I think even then I should have cried off if my own sense of duty and Walter Beresford's determination had not carried the day.

I have not many social pleasures, and the recollection of that dinner-party stands out amongst the few I can remember—chiefly those at my own father's house—as if limned in letters of gold. You who know how tender womanhood is over suffering manhood can form some slight estimate of the loving care the ladies took of me. I speak, perhaps, more especially now of Mrs. and Miss Beachwood. As for the latter, I fell over head and ears in love straight away, and have remained there or thereabouts ever since. Don't be alarmed, it is quite Platonic, I assure you, and as such I hope and believe reciprocated. As we drove along the high road

the heavens above the horizon seemed a perfect blaze of colour; gold, dark blue, light blue, purple and white, mingling and blending, with here and there a darker cloud shape to give relief to the rest. We were the last to arrive. The guests were grouped round their host, all standing together watching the approach of sunset. It was half-past seven. Drawing-room and conservatory windows stood wide open. The day had been hot; the evening was full of cool night scents, just making themselves perceptible; jessamine and mignonette above the rest. A gardener was in front watering a bed with a hose, unconscious of the sunset, except in so far as it acted as a barometer and predicted the weather. The Rector himself found me a comfortable sofa corner. It was one of my good days, however, and I had been careful to rest all the afternoon. I can see fair Lilian Beachwood now, when I shut my eyes and dip into the past, just as clearly as I did then.

She is standing by the window, occasionally watching the gardener water her favourites, and ever and anon turning to speak to Mr. Fairlegh. As she does so her lips part for a smile. How lovely she looks when she smiles! She is dressed in black lace to-day, with a rose in her hair. As I turn round I see Walter Beresford watching her, and Miss Wyncombe watching him. Before dinner is announced, the two girls pass me going into the conservatory: Miss Wyncombe's flower had fallen; she is going to choose another geranium, which will soon follow its predecessor's example. As they pass through the doorway I hear:

"It must have taken him an hour at least to arrange that front curl. It is said that he always goes into the vestry to arrange his whiskers just before preaching. I cannot say whether it is true or not. I only know he always goes in, and papa never does."

I did not hear the response, if indeed any were made. "The minx!" I muttered between my clenched teeth.

"Thank you, you are complimentary. Was that meant for me? What is a minx, pray? A masculine word, evidently. The masculine mind is fertile in inventing complimentary phrases for us poor women. Let me see, it was some poor male creature who said:—'Frailty, thy name is woman.' I don't believe women would be any more frail than men if they were not tight-laced and coddled all their life. And as for courage and energy, one good woman is worth ten men."

"You know very well it was not meant for you, Lady Fairlegh."

"Well, if it was meant for Lily Beachwood there, let me tell you there is not another like her to be found in your part of the country, I'll bet you my best horsewhip to a penny whistle."

"Neither was it Miss Beachwood; so don't be cross, Lady Fairlegh."

"Ah! I thought so—the other young woman—brought out the truth, you see, by a little well-directed cross-examination. Well, she may be a minx; I have not quite taken her measure yet. But here is dinner. Ten minutes late, too, and I am peckish. I wonder who is going to be responsible

for you. If no one else is I must do it myself. Ah, here comes the Rector for me, and the fair Lily for you. Better luck you see."

"Now, Lily, don't be too killing, and, above all, don't let the other young men knock him on the head through jealousy. Distribute your favours, my dear."

"Lady Fairlegh is favoured," said Lilian with a smile.

The dining-room was darkened as far as daylight was concerned, and lighted with a large lamp in the middle of the table.

Excellent cooking, good wine, and a constant rippling stream of pleasant conversation. I did not care to talk much, so listened to Lady Fairlegh and the Rector.

They were discussing the chances her Ladyship's brother had for the county, which he was canvassing with a view to an approximate election.

"You know," laughed Lady Fairlegh, "Ned has as much an idea of speaking as he has of flying; so I, who am a born orator, write all his speeches for him, and he learns them by heart, I believe, while he is shaving."

"Well, he certainly does not turn them out at all badly, if that after the market dinner at Farnham the other Saturday was a fair specimen," said the Rector.

"Oh, as a rule, he manages to have them off quite pat, but the other day he came to sad grief. I had given him a set of opinions of the most revolutionary sort, which it was to be expected the other side would promulgate. These he was to put forward first, and

then the last part of the speech was devoted to demolishing what had gone before. Only, unfortunately he learnt the first part correctly enough, but forgot the last, and when he looked into his hat some rogue had gone off with the copy. I have had serious fears since then of his being run in as a Chartist at the very least."

The Rector laughed heartily.

*Vis-à-vis* to me were Miss Wyncombe and Raymond Winslow. I heard the former say to the latter, as they both rose when the ladies were leaving the dining-room, "Please tell your friend, Mr. Beresford, I have an ivy-leaf geranium of the kind we were talking of some time ago to show him in the garden after dinner."

It was a lovely night. All except Mrs. Beachwood and the cripple turned into the garden after dinner, the gentlemen having remained in the dining-room only a few minutes after the ladies had left them. As they entered the drawing-room Miss Wyncombe stood by the conservatory door looking expectantly. Lilian Beachwood stood by the window. Had she expected any one to go to her side? She had hardly spoken to Walter Beresford all the evening. Etiquette had sent the parson in with the lady of the house to dinner.

Walter Beresford went straight to Miss Wyncombe's side. Common politeness demanded it. He could do no other after the message he had received. They went out together without apparently saying a word. Lilian, who of course knew nothing of what had gone before, bit her lips. A

cold chill seemed to pass through her limbs. It must be the evening. She took up an antimacassar, red and woolly, and put it shawl-wise over her shoulders—what sloping shoulders they were! Then she accepted Mr. Fairlegh's arm, and stepped out through the window. A thought flashed across her, "Had Walter Beresford come here only to meet Maud Wyncombe after all?" She shivered again.

"Lily, you are cold, let us go in for something warmer than that thin bit of stuff," said her companion.

"No, thank you, I am quite warm, Mr. Fairlegh."

"How strange we should meet so far away from home, Mr. Beresford! I had no notion this part of Glebeshire was already honoured by a visit from you when I came South."

"Nor I that you intended coming here, or, in fact, that you proposed leaving home at all."

"Neither did I when you left; but the Beach-woods always invite me every year, and this year papa insisted that I should come—so here I am."

The speakers were standing in the conservatory, and the windows were open. As the last words were spoken a scrunch was heard on the gravel. Two people would pass in a moment by the open window. Walter Beresford was standing facing the flowers. Maud Wyncombe had her face turned to the window. She half-turned after the last sentence and said, bending over the flowers, "You evidently received my message through your friend." And then turning, she spoke more clearly and slowly, "And of course I knew you would come out to

me." And then turning again, "I suppose you are the same ardent botanist as ever?"

Was it by chance that the two walkers on the gravel were Mr. Fairlegh and Lilian Beachwood?

"And of course I knew you would come out to me." Lilian shivered again. "Yes, it was a little cold," so they turned into the house.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE FÊTE DAY.

THE Monday following upon the dinner-party, related in the last chapter, was one long looked forward to, and long to be remembered in the country side. It was the day fixed for what had become an annual festival. For some weeks previously a stranger's eye would have been attracted anywhere in the country side by a flaming poster on the walls, which on closer inspection revealed the fact that a great fête—carefully pronounced as written by the country-folk—would be held in Drayton Park for the benefit of the Sustentation Fund of St. Benedict's Convalescent Home; the park being kindly thrown open for that purpose by Ralph Fairlegh, Esq., &c., &c. Then followed a long list of amusements, which apparently catered for the enjoyment of all classes. They were to include lawn-tennis, a cricket-match, donkey races, wrestling, leaping, and to conclude with dancing in a tent. Mr. Fairlegh had insisted upon Walter Beresford and Raymond Winslow going over for the occasion. All the country side, including young ladies of all degrees, were to be there, from Sallie Hunter, the prettiest farm lass in the three kingdoms, to Miss Lilian—"Bless her sweet face!"—herself. Besides

this there would be no end of fun, as he had himself got up a donkey race for gentlemen riders only; and the best blood of the county were going to ride in real jockey colours. He wound up by declaring "that he would take no refusal, and he should send his T-cart and man over for them about eleven A.M. To tell the truth, the young men were nothing loth to go. They were out for a holiday, and might as well see all there was to be seen. Whether there were any other reasons I will not presume to say.

The morning was gloriously fine and yet not oppressively sultry. The T-cart—a specimen of small dog-cart—was at the door a few minutes to eleven, and the two young men were soon seated in it ready to start. The groom drove at a rapid pace—perhaps he was afraid of losing some of the fun—up hills and down dales. The scenery was lovely, getting wilder and wilder as they advanced. As they approached the lodge gates they passed other traps of all kinds standing by the roadside without the animals which drew them; they having been taken out and tethered under the trees near. Here and there, too, on their way, they had seen one or two donkeys led either by grooms, if they were for the gentlemen's race, or by their owners if for the other races—most of them apparently very unwilling to go in the direction their masters wished them—all gaily caparisoned, and decked out with ribbons and rosettes. After passing the lodge they drove for some distance by the side of the ground dedicated to the day's amusement. The only things to be seen, however, from the road were two very large tents, which admitted no view beyond. They were

met at the door by Ralph Fairlegh himself, who came out to them from a group of donkey owners, who were receiving directions as to the disposal of their beasts. One of them, evidently, had a very crack donkey, for which he wanted to get a gentleman rider, that he might enter it for the gentleman-jockey's race, in which the best prize of the day was given; but Mr. Fairlegh, much to his chagrin, ruled him out of court, as the entry had to be made the day before.

"Hallo," said the Squire, "here you are! very glad to see you; can't attend to you, though—other fish to fry. You will find Lady Fairlegh indoors, if women are to be depended upon at all. She promised me she would stay at home and receive the ladies who are going to honour us with their presence. The chances are, however, that she is at the other end of the field by this time."

The two gentlemen passed on across the terrace, which was for the nonce marked out for tennis; two additional courts having been made there to the others at the back of the mansion. At the hall door they were met by the mistress of the house.

"Ah, how do you do? how do you do? Glad to see William has not broken your neck. All the same it ruins my reputation as a prophet, as I declared he would. Ralph said he was the only man he could spare, and there wasn't far to fall out of the trap, and that the roads were pretty soft—no mending going on at present. But come in; here is a roomful of beauty."

They crossed the wide hall, full of trophies of the chase from all parts of the world, with a huge

iron stove in the middle. Two or three dogs lounged about in the sunshine, but made no sign; either the visitors were privileged, being with their mistress, or they had got tired of protesting against these continual invasions of the sanctuary.

The long drawing-room, which looked out on the terrace in front of the house, was nearly full of ladies, interspersed with a few young men, who were in attendance. The rest were either out in the park or putting on flannels upstairs preparatory to taking part in the cricket-match. Lady Fairlegh introduced the new-comers here and there; but as soon as they had reached the Misterton Rectory party she left them, to greet some new arrivals. Lilian was rather *distraite*, and after a while proposed a move out of doors. Her mother preferred to remain and rest. Lilian rather pointedly gave Raymond Winslow the cue to accompany her as cavalier.

"I must look to you to pilot me out of this crowd, Mr. Winslow, and see me through the danger of wild donkeys and other dangerous animals."

Maud Wyncombe and, of course, Walter Beresford followed. The former to the latter, smilingly: "How nice it is for us to be together amongst so many strange faces! I should not have come to-day had I not felt I could look to you to take care of me. You know I am horribly timid about the lower orders, besides being shy about so many strangers; but with you—and I know you will look after me, won't you?—I don't fear anything, and shall make up my mind to enjoy myself thoroughly." Maud Wyncombe

turned the full battery of her dark lustrous eyes—no one knew how to use them better than she did—upon the young clergyman as she spoke. The words, too, were just such as are best calculated to stir the depths of a man's nature. It is hard to resist a lovely woman at any time; but when she looks to you for support, for protection, for care—when she leans upon you—then it is that she strikes that chord of chivalry which is hid somewhere in every true manly bosom.

"Yes, Miss Wyncombe, I shall be happy to do what I can. Although I cannot agree with you that these people are strangers; they have been so kind that a comparatively short period seems to have transformed them into friends."

Maud Wyncombe made no reply; perhaps she was not particularly pleased with the young clergyman's answer.

The afternoon passed pleasantly. The donkey races afforded the greatest fun. All the gentlemen—a lieutenant-colonel and a deputy-lieutenant among them—were arrayed in silk attire.

At first nothing would induce the donkeys to get into line, and still less were they eager to start. Half of them succeeded in placing their jockeys firmly but kindly on the grass, and then pursued their own course over the field. One alone bore its rider triumphantly to the winning-post; the rest were nowhere. After which there was much cheering.

"A donkey race. Yes, the name is very appropriate. Don't you think so, Mr. Beresford? Only it is very hard to decide whether the riders or the

steeds can lay the fairest claim to the title. It certainly fits the riders remarkably well," commented Miss Wyncombe.

Mr. Beresford bowed: "I am afraid I rather agree with you, Miss Wyncombe."

As the day wore on a move was made to the tents for dancing.

None of the gentry joined in this pastime; but it had no lack of supporters amongst the farming and labouring classes. There was some singularly graceful dancing, of a type almost gone out now in fashionable circles. The girls, especially, went through their part of the performance with a quietness and dignity which would have done no discredit to any station or class in life.

A young sporting clergyman, with turned-down collar and grey trousers, had joined the party, and was eagerly showing the prettiest girl of the country side to Miss Wyncombe, to whom he had been introduced some days before at a garden party.

Walter Beresford seized the opportunity, and came to Lilian's side. He had been waiting for the chance of speaking to her all the afternoon; and now, when it had come, there seemed nothing to say. He turned several remarks over in his mind, and his lips half-framed them, but they all seemed so hopelessly commonplace that he considered about them so long as to finally leave them unsaid.

He had a very good notion that Maud Wyncombe soon give the Reverend Berdmore Shrimpton y, and then he would be pounced on again he could say anything. Luckily he under- hat gentleman's exquisite imperviousness to

all hints, and absolute indifference arising from unconsciousness to the most studied coldness. Walter Beresford felt perfectly certain that Miss Beachwood did not at all relish his prolonged absence from her side. Surely, he thought, one woman might have the sharpness to see through another better.

At last he said in sheer desperation :—

"I hope you have enjoyed the day, Miss Beachwood. I have tried to come and ask you several times, but have always been prevented. Miss Wyncombe declared she could not be left amongst strangers."

"Old friends naturally look to one another," said Lilian, coldly; with a slight stress on the word "friends;" but all the time watching the dancers, as if that at the present time concerned her more than anything else in the world.

Had Walter Beresford only known, the studied indifference should have gratified rather than pained him.

"Friendship—in fact, all feelings that depend on sympathy—is not to be measured by time. It sometimes springs up like——" he paused for a moment.

"Like a gourd you were going to say—exactly—Jonah's famous gourd, for instance. I think it disappeared in a night, if I remember rightly. I see Mr. Shrimpton has left Miss Wyncombe. As it is nearly dinner-time I feel sure she will be glad of your escort into the house. Mr. Fairlegh is coming towards us and will doubtless take me under his charge." Poor Walter Beresford!

"May not I see you into the house, Miss Beachwood?"

"Thank you, I would not have you hurt Miss Wyncombe's feelings for anything. Old friends should look after each other! Mr. Fairlegh and I are old friends!"

Maud Wyncombe exercised all her blandishments on her cavalier as they ascended the slope to the house; but his replies were mostly in monosyllable.

"She has evidently been giving it to him," was her inward comment. "And a very good thing too."

A large party sat down to dinner in the fine old baronial dining-hall of the Fairleghs. It was hung round with family portraits, grim and severe most of them—very unlike their present representatives. Between the paintings—as was the case with the entrance-hall—were various trophies of the chase, only these were chiefly English and Scotch. All the middle of the table was a mass of flowers running the whole length. The dinner was wholly *à la Russe.*

Lady Fairlegh plied her sarcasms rather unmercifully on the heads of the riders in the donkey race, most of whom were present, and took them very good-naturedly.

Lilian had fallen to the lot of Walter Beresford, and was making amends for her coldness before by an almost eager conversation on the events of the afternoon. Perhaps she had judged her former show of resentment not quite dignified, and even a little unladylike.

"There are three things a man never does well: ride a donkey, propose, and carve a goose. Nevertheless, they are never content until they have tried all three. My husband, I know from experience, is a dreadful hand at all of them. In fact, I always have to take the last out of his hands altogether." This from the hostess.

"Are you sure, Lady Fanny, you did not undertake all three?" The speaker was an old gentleman, sitting on the right of the hostess, with a jolly round face.

"You hold your tongue, Sir George! I believe you never had the courage to try any of them!"

"And not meeting with a second Lady Fairlegh they have consequently gone undone, you see. Talking about proposals, did I ever tell you of the gentleman whom I knew who proposed to a lady six times?"

"No, Sir George; you had not reached that point last time I heard you tell the story. The gentleman had then only proposed four times!"

"Don't be sarcastic, Lady Fairlegh! This is quite a different story, as you would have found out if you had only listened patiently. You shall not hear it at all if you interrupt me in that way! Well, the gentleman proposed six times. At the sixth time the lady said, 'I hate you, Mr. ——.' 'I cannot help that,' he answered. 'You are going to marry me!' And sure enough they are one of the happiest married couples in the county at this present time."

There was a lull in the conversation, and then Mr. Fairlegh spoke from the other end of the table. "I had lots of inquiries for Sir Lionel Battersby to-day. You are his nearest neighbour and old friend, Lilian;

do you happen to know when he is expected home?"

Lilian turned very white, but her voice was quite steady. She knew all eyes were upon her, although Mr. Fairlegh had spoken quite unconsciously. "I believe he has gone abroad for the sake of his health, and is not expected at the Hall for some time."

Lilian had told a fib for once in her life. Walter Beresford, finding that he was the only one who knew of the late accident which had taken place in Switzerland, related the news he had received from his mother. He could not help noticing how white and still Lilian was looking. He might, however, have thought she was tired after the long day.

As the Misterton Rectory party was taking its departure in the evening, Maud Wyncombe took the opportunity of whispering to him, "What a boor Mr. Fairlegh is to speak like that to Lilian! Why, it is common talk in the county, as, of course, you know, how badly Sir Lionel treated her. Won her heart, and then, when every one expected a proposal, started off for the Continent. I think this accident only a judgment on him. I felt so sorry for her, poor girl, when they were all talking about him. She is not the girl to care by halves, and you could see how deeply she felt it!"

Raymond Winslow's advice on the way home was not consolatory.

"My dear fellow, I pity you from the bottom of my heart! One woman is more than a match for any man; but two! My advice to you is—cut and run."

And Walter Beresford answered never a word.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE.

I HAVE hitherto acted mainly as chronicler of other people's doings. I must now, however, intrude my own a little into this history. Shortly after my arrival I had discovered from Walter Beresford that his cousin was anxious to let the cottage for a term of years; and as I had conceived a rare fancy for it, I early wrote to my father to ask him if he would be willing to take it. He and I rarely lived all the year round by the great lake side, and we had of late years been looking for a second residence that would suit us when we wanted to live elsewhere. Trusting to my recommendation and to the opinion of Raymond Winslow, of which he thought much, my father had opened up negotiations with Captain Lloyd Beresford. On the fête Monday he wrote me word that they were concluded, and that he was now, to all intents and purposes, tenant of the cottage; although the Captain had stipulated that my father should not enter on possession until his cousin had quite done with it. My father's letter to me concluded with a promise that he would run down to see his old possession and his new one as soon as possible, probably to remain a day or two if Mr. Beresford would kindly give him house-room. I lived on that promise

for several days. At the end of the week he came. I wish you could see him—dear old father.! How high he carried his brave old head! The village blacksmith never looked the world straighter in the face than he. I suppose no one would have exactly called him handsome, except myself; but he was pleasant to look upon, and there was almost a womanly tenderness about his smile. Perhaps the habit of looking after me had something to do with it. Both my friends liked and respected my father. He had not that air of patronage with younger men which some middle-aged people seem to acquire. His influence over them was all the greater that he was ever courteous towards their opinions, and deferential to their judgment, when they differed from him. I wish I could describe him to you, so that you might see him! I suppose he was about five feet ten high, grey eyes and iron-grey hair, no moustache, but a fringe of whisker; quiet almost to reticence; but with a pleasant hearty ring in his voice when he spoke. The day after he came was Saturday. We had promised to join the Rectory party at luncheon, which was to be taken picnic fashion out under the trees, where Lilian had first been seen—that eventful morning in two lives—by the two young men. I like to carry back my memories to that sunny summer day at Misterton Rectory. Shall I confess it was all the pleasanter to some of us that Miss Wyncombe was prevented by a severe headache putting in an appearance? The courtly Rector was soon deep in conversation with the well-informed, healthy-minded merchant. It was a pleasure to a reader like Mr. Beachwood to

meet with a man of the world like my father. I lay back and heard them talk, and watched the butterflies, and listened to the larks carolling far overhead. Walter Beresford had been talking, as was his wont, with eagerness over lunch on some of the many subjects in which he was interested ; and I had noticed how thoroughly one of his hearers had evidently appreciated his enthusiasm and shared his feelings. Somehow to-day, as I lay back afterwards, the problem what was to come of all this did not bother me so much as usual. Perhaps it was the restfulness of the summer day, and the external peace of nature ; perhaps it was the feeling of having my father so close at hand. I never knew what responsibility was when he was near. Perhaps it was a higher, surer, deeper restfulness still—trust in the hand of Him who weaves the web of human life. Often and often have I found, even in my simple and imperfect experience, that the very thread we would leave out of the texture He weaves in ; and shows us, when all is complete, how imperfect in fulness of shade, of colour, of beauty, the whole would be without it !

Lilian and Walter had continued the conversation begun at luncheon. For a time they walked about, Lilian stooping ever and anon to pick up daisies. After a time they settled, by mutual consent, on to the very knoll upon which one first saw the other. Lilian had laid her hat on one side. How fair she looked ! I thought I had never seen her look so beautiful. Something that Walter Beresford had said had imparted an extra shade of seriousness, a deeper melancholy of thought, to her face. It was the shaded background which brings out the picture.

Something had led him on to speak of his father. He died when Walter was only ten years old. Any one looking at the son, with his rare earnestness, his eagerness for the right, the nobility of his thoughts, would judge that such a son came of a worthy stock —of a noble sire. Walter had lived in the country then; but his mother had early moved to a home by the sea, and he was now telling her some of the tales of their life—of the shipwrecks which happened now and again on their coast, and of the thrilling sound of the guns proclaiming a ship on the rocks. It was all new to her, and she drank in every word. Perhaps she would have listened attentively enough to him whatever he might have been saying.

I had been watching them half in serious thought, half with amusement, and wholly with that sort of pleasure which comes to us through the external senses, when anything beautiful either is before our eyes or strikes upon our ear, when some one came and touched me gently with his foot. It was my father. I half rose up, but he sat down beside me.

"This is very serious, my boy. Where is it all going to end?" He looked full in my face as he questioned me.

"I suppose it is tending towards fate, father," I said, rather vaguely. "They certainly are very suited to one another, and they don't look as if they disliked one another either!"

My father did not seem to be so struck by the argument.

"What can the father and mother of the girl be about? I have a great mind to ask them; only, I

suppose, it is none of my business. Your friend does not look like a trifler, eh, boy?"

"No, that he never was or would be!"

"Well, then he is a fool! I am afraid, however, we all are that some time in our lives! What does he say, boy? What does he say himself?"

"Well, father, I never felt shy of him before; but I have not liked to speak to him on this subject. I cannot for the life of me tell why."

"And of course he has not volunteered anything to you?"

"No, nothing."

And all the while two chains were having link after link added to them, both of which were approaching completion — the daisy chain which would be broken in an hour. What was to become of the other? Who can tell?

At night—or, rather, in the late evening—I lay, as was my wont, on a sofa almost in the open window of the little cottage. My father was writing at the other end of the room, looking rather firm and grim, and square and massive, as he always did when he wrote. A lamp was lighted nearer him than me. It seemed to bring out his face in hard lines. I felt as I looked at him that there was written there the record of a courageous life, of difficulties overcome, opposing forces conquered, hard knocks exchanged —more perhaps given than received. Writing, perhaps, did not come easily to him. He always gave you the idea of drawing up somebody's death-warrant. I wonder how he looked when he wrote his love letters? I suppose he did write them! I

feel sure he never penned the nonsense which one reads in reports in the law courts.

Love! It seems strange to me sometimes, and perhaps now and then a little sad, to think there is one dominant feeling in other people's lives which is shut out of mine. I think I felt this a little more to-day than usual after seeing those two. I cannot but fancy those monks in old days who came of a noble stock must have felt something the same feeling when they chanted the army to battle, but did not join in the actual fight. I think some of them must have burnt to be at it tooth and nail, and probably many of them would have done it far better than the knights themselves.

How still the night is! not a breath, not a sound! It is almost oppressive; I think thunder must be in the air. A thick haze is settling down over the river. I think the haze must have taken possession of me for a little while. I was roused by a touch. It was my father. He was bending over me. How different he looked now from what he did when he was writing; all the lines were gone. He was very tender over me. He looked it now.

"Morrice, my boy," he said, "I have been thinking——"

He paused, but I made no reply. It was my father's way to pause occasionally when other people would have gone on. He was ready enough of action, but deliberate, not to say slow of speech, especially if anything stirred him deeply.

"I have been thinking about those young people. I do not like to think that the young man who has had a great career before him, and will one day, if I

judge rightly, be at the top of the tree—I do not like to think that he is stopped now from mating a young woman who looks to me—looks, mind you, are deceptive—worthy of him."

I only answered, "Well, father." I knew there was more to come.

"Neither do I like long engagements," he went on. "It takes the bloom out of young cheeks, and it might make the young man take something now to improve his present position at the expense of the future. I have seen so much of that in the Church in my time—young and capable men snapping at the first chance of a small living, and getting shut up therein for life."

My father, when once started, was sometimes a little apt to dogmatize.

He went on: "Now, my boy, you know my affairs as well as I do. There is more than enough for you and me. What do you say to my offering to settle, say £200 a year—in addition to what he has that would be ample for the young folks—on your friend until he has £600 a year of his own, the principal then to return to me or mine?"

I grasped my father's hand. "How kind and generous of you, father, to have thought of it! But do you think he will accept it?"

"Accept it? of course he will. Catch a young man refusing to jump at a chance like that; especially a young man in love. He would be a fool!"

While we were talking the storm I had foreseen had gathered. It now burst in all its fury. H grand it was! clap following clap, until th seemed at one time a continuous roar, such

should imagine the musketry would sound on a battle-field. One could almost imagine that the heavens were God's battle-field, and that the powers of good were combating the powers of evil. My father shut the window, and wheeled me farther into the room. He put out the lamp. Every now and then the whole room was flooded with the soft yellow white light.

The storm had continued about ten minutes when the two young men came in together. They had remained to dine at the Rectory, had made a détour on their way home, and had been caught in the storm. Both were drenched from head to foot, and went straight upstairs to change. We only saw them for a minute or two. Winslow was impassive, as usual, but the evening seemed to have rather clouded Beresford's face and brow. Perhaps Miss Wyncombe's reappearance at dinner-time did not mend matters; or perhaps he did not like being caught in a storm.

Later on in the evening, after I had gone to bed, my father asked Walter Beresford to go with him into the study. They remained there very few minutes. Then both went back to the morning-room—called so, I presume, because we never occupied it until the evening, just as the study was never used for study. I lay in bed, and mapped out all sorts of futures, and built all sorts of castles, all dependent on the somewhat shadowy foundation of the marriage between Walter Beresford and Lilian Beachwood.

Presently my father came up to bed. He always looked in upon me the last thing, wherever he was;

he did so to-night. He said, however, never a word —only stood looking at me, candle in hand.

"Well, father, what has happened?" I inquired at last.

"I called your friend into the study, and told him, as delicately as I could, that I feared he was circumscribed by want of means—I did not say in what way—that I believed in his future; and then I went on to make the proposal we talked over this evening."

My father talked so slowly, I felt I could have shaken him.

"Well, father, what did he say?"

"He said 'his means were equal to his wants.' Of course he thanked me warmly enough, but that goes for nothing. He would have nothing whatever to say to the project."

"What will you do now? I am disappointed."

"Do? I can do nothing. I thought your friend was not a fool, and I find he is one. Good-night."

Off went my father and the candle. I had never seen him so savage before. He was evidently very bent on his scheme.

I lay and turned things over in my mind until I went to sleep. When I awoke I found that I had been doing nothing but dream about—Miss Wyncombe.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### FLITTINGS.

I SUPPOSE it cannot be much more than a week ago since that quiet day I enjoyed so much, when we lunched under the trees near the Rectory, and yet it seems ages and ages.

When many events—and events, too, of great importance—have elapsed in a very short time, it gives one, I should imagine, very much the same feeling that a traveller must have when he emerges from the Mont Cenis Tunnel. Can he really have been only so short a while ago on the other side of those giant mountains? Great natural barriers must seem to place stations on each side of them so very far apart. It is much the same with great events. They seem to separate into vast distances the little things of life. How little we all thought that day that it was the ending of our pleasant meetings; but I must begin at the beginning, and tell you all about it. The very next day but one after the storm, Walter Beresford, who had spent the morning, to all appearances, quietly fishing, but without much result, was met at lunch by a telegram. It was from Sir Lionel Battersby, and stated that his mother was not so well as she had been; that there was no imme-

diate danger, but that he and Lady Battersby did not like to take the responsibility, and would be glad if Mr. Beresford could go out to them. There was no time to lose if the express was to be caught from Chester. Raymond Winslow hurriedly put a few necessary things together into a bag. It is at a time like that—I suppose it is very wrong of me—that I hate my own helplessness; or perhaps I ought to say, want of helpfulness.

Walter Beresford, poor fellow, looked very white, would eat nothing, but drank a glass of water, and wrote down a few words for me to telegraph to Mr. Wyncombe, his rector. I had some sandwiches got ready for his journey. In a few minutes the low easy trap, which my father had bought for me only two days before, was brought round to the door. Before getting in, Walter—who had before hardly spoken an unnecessary word since the arrival of the message—turned to me to say good-bye. His lips quivered as he spoke more than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"Good-bye, dear old fellow! give my warmest thanks to your good father. I appreciate more than he knows his kind offer, but I cannot accept it. Good-bye!" He shook both hands as he spoke. I was leaning up against the cottage door-post, resting. "I have a feeling that a long time—much will happen before we meet again."

Those were his farewell words to me. Before I knew it he was in the trap by Raymond Winslow's side, and they were off. I had said not a word in reply. The words seemed to choke me as they rose to my throat. I stood and watched them until only

a cloud of dust was visible, a corner of the road having hid them from sight. I sent an earnest prayer after them. I gazed for a few minutes into vacancy, then I hobbled back to my sofa in the cottage. It was a hot July day; the blinds were drawn down, and a shutter pulled forward half across the window. It struck me as very dismal. Raymond Winslow had told me he should go as far as Chester. I felt very lonely. My father would be away all day, and perhaps the next. He had gone to Liverpool on some business. Did I ever mention that he had formerly been in business—a general merchant—that he was now merely a sleeping partner, and amused himself mainly with farming? He, however, liked occasionally to return to his old pursuits. Presently the old housekeeper—in the country servants are like cats, and belong to houses rather than people; she and old Harris had both come as young hands to Captain Lloyd Beresford's father—brought me a basin of soup. Then I lay and rested and bothered myself. One thought kept obtruding itself on my mind. How odd it was Walter had never thought of sending a message, through me, to the Rectory people! They had been so very kind, and he was so thoughtful for others. One would have expected that even in the midst of trouble he would have remembered to send a message of farewell. Perhaps he would entrust one to Raymond Winslow. Was it vanity? I fancied he would have preferred giving it me. It turned out afterwards that he never mentioned them to either of us. Raymond said that they hardly exchanged a word before they parted at Chester. After a while I heard the trap

return, and Harris tell Elizabeth—the housekeeper before mentioned—"that the young measter had drove as if old 'Arry wor a-trying to get up behind!" After an hour or two the Rector was announced. I was so glad to see him. I was thoroughly sick and tired of the company of my own thoughts. He was very sincerely sorry to hear the news, and spoke so warmly, kindly, and sympathizingly of our mutual friend that my heart quite went out to the old man. Before he left me Raymond Winslow had returned. That night we sat and talked things over far into the night. We were quite agreed that it was the best thing possible for Walter Beresford to leave Bickley; we were only sorry for the way in which that departure had been brought about. The only question that now remained was, how far had matters gone before that departure took place. Had it come soon enough? Raymond Winslow thought it had; I thought it had not.

It was very hard to say how far matters had gone. It is always dangerous to come to any decided conclusion on questions so little on the surface as those of the affections. Before we parted, Raymond Winslow announced his intention of going home in a few days. Matters of business had demanded his presence for some time; now that he was no longer needed he would attend to them. The day he left was that selected for the return home of Miss Wyncombe. She travelled part of the way with him. Lilian was heartily glad at her departure. And yet the last few days had been spent by her visitor in very skilfully trying to throw the glamour of her

personality over Lilian. It only succeeded in making the latter consider herself strangely harsh and prejudiced. The prejudice itself was too deep to be touched. One sentence of Maud Wyncombe's, perhaps, did more than anything else to heal the breach. It was spoken the night before she left, nominally to the Rector—more, however, to Lilian herself. "I do hope, for our poor people's sake, his mother's illness will not keep Mr. Beresford long in Switzerland. They will all miss him so much."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### REACTION.

LILIAN was not altogether pleased to find that her nature could be so easily ruffled, as her brief experience of the fellowship of the daughter of her father's quondam friend had proved that it could be. She came rather hastily to the conclusion that her nature was one either peculiarly averse to strangers, or that irritability had long been dormant in her system which required only very slight friction to call it forth. It argues the rare simplicity of her training and habits of thought, that she did not connect her antipathy to Maud Wyncombe in the very slightest degree to Walter Beresford. It is not pleasant to any one to find a latent tendency to evil. It was less pleasant to Lilian than to most people. All the faults that she had been cognizant of before this eventful summer in her life had been rather negative than positive; her sins of commission were few; her sins of omission were summed up in that one self-accusation of uselessness. Now she was brought face to face with something really wrong. She had early been taught from the good old book that the sun ought not to go down on her wrath. And yet the sun went down, and she did not find, even without much self-examination, that the days as they passed

found her or left her any better. She knew it was wrong to be angry, and she was angry; she felt it was wrong to indulge unkindly thoughts, and yet they came unbidden and refused to depart.

Lilian had little to do, and plenty of time to think. It is a bad thing for any one to be so circumstanced. It was worse for Lilian's peace of mind than it would be for most people's. If only some one would have been very ill in the village, and required attention, it would have afforded some relief and help to turn her thoughts into some fresh channel. But no. Even old Roger, after some deliberation, had decided to become convalescent, and the blacksmith's twins were redolent of infant life, and health and spirits. Somehow she did not feel inclined to talk the thing over with her mother—any one else was out of the question—and so the matter remained locked up in her own bosom—the worst place for it. The organ was her only solace. She never resorted to it so often in her life as at this time; only, unfortunately, the organ reminded her constantly of that first Sunday and of—Walter Beresford. Well, and what did she think of him? She was surprised to find him so much in her thoughts. Turn where they would, the roads all converged to one centre. It may be questioned whether his presence or his absence had more effect on the mind and imagination, and, shall I add?—the heart of the young girl. She had pictured him often and often taking that lonely journey full of sad thoughts; she pictured him daily by his mother's side in a far-off land. She eagerly looked day after day for news coming to her father, but none came.

All the circle at the Rectory showed much kindness—Lilian more than any of them—to the cripple at the cottage; but that only made matters worse, for he talked just as she thought of Walter Beresford.

Even the Rector, who was not devoid of occupation, and who, besides his clerical duties, was an ardent gardener, felt a little reaction, and its consequent unrest, after the young men had gone. That Lilian felt a little *distraite* her mother thought quiet natural. She therefore said nothing to her on the subject. But as time passed on the listlessness which had set in—the dislike of seeing visitors—the feeling of some instinctive restraint even with her mother—all these outward and visible signs of some change in the girl herself became so marked that her mother spoke to her on the subject.

They were in the morning room. Breakfast had been over some time. And yet Lilian made no move to set about her usual morning occupations. Her plants, her favoured and favourite ferns, were as yet unwatered, and yet she made no move. They were evidently far from her thoughts. She stood in front of the window, gazing out. The window looked upon the yard at the back of the house, which led to the churchyard. But Lilian was evidently staring at vacancy. Every one knows that fixed look which indicates seeing and not perceiving. Once more her mother's words made her start. It was not the first time by many that Mrs. Beachwood had noticed this absent-mindedness on the part of her daughter.

"Child, your thoughts have gone wool-gathering; where have they gone to?"

"Nowhere, mother." Lilian started and blushed.

"Then it is time you began something more profitable."

Mrs. Beachwood took a step forward. She stooped and kissed Lilian on the forehead. "What has ailed you of late, dear? You are not a bit like your old self."

But the girl shrank from the kind, searching look and inquiry. "Nothing, mother, really. I am quite well."

Lilian gave her mother a long lingering kiss, and then went out of the room with her basket.

Mrs. Beachwood was not satisfied. Lilian was paler than her wont. She had always been healthy-minded and healthy-bodied. She had never troubled the doctors much. But now Mrs. Beachwood determined to consult Dr. Jones without Lilian's knowledge. Her suspicions never for a moment fell on any deeper cause.

Dr. Jones suggested a course of iron. "He generally found iron a good tonic for young girls. No doubt a little introduced in Lilian's system would do all that was required."

Poor man, he meant what he said. That Lilian did not require any medicine the British Pharmacopœia contained was not his fault, but hers. Lilian implicitly obeyed her mother's directions, protesting, however, all the while, that it was quite unnecessary. Even her mother, however, could not believe that the prescription did her any good. She was just as absent, just as *distraite* as ever. Her interest in her old pursuits did not revive at all—in fact, it seemed to diminish, as week followed week,

rather than increase. Lady Fanny Fairlegh noticed the change, and did all she could to arouse Lilian out of her inaction.

She would call round for Lilian to drive with her; take her on shopping excursions with her into Chester; in fact, resort to all kinds of feminine devices—all of which ignominiously failed. Last of all, she came to the conclusion that what Lilian ought to have was a little flirtation, even if it led to nothing afterwards. So she invited a far-away cousin, who had the reputation of being a great ladies' man, to come and stay. It is a little doubtful whether Lady Fairlegh or Lilian more consistently hated him at the end of a ten days' stay. Lady Fairlegh had never a good word to say for her husband; but, at any rate, he was a man. But a lounger, a *dilettante*, a puppy, a mere woman's pet lap-dog—Lady Fairlegh hated the whole species. Captain Wellesley Crawker did not get on any better with Lilian Beachwood. He was accustomed to conquest in town; he expected unqualified surrender in the country. He got nothing of the sort. He felt it his duty to lay the lovely she-cleric—as he facetiously called her—at his feet, and in return she consistently snubbed him. He would liked to have talked nonsense to her about roses, and to stare down into her eyes and imagine himself effective. But Lilian was distantly cool, and finally avoided him altogether.

Maud Wyncombe had written two long letters to her, but in them not one word about the Reverend Walter Beresford. She omitted altogether, by some strange inadvertence, to say that she had written—of

course, for her father—to his curate. The conclusion, nevertheless, of her letter to the young clergyman would have been of interest to her friend. It ran as follows :—

"You will be interested to hear what close friends dear Lilian and your friend Mr. Raymond Winslow became after your departure. It was quite the 'talk of the neighbourhood' that he was evidently cutting out the truant baronet. I hope it may be so, I am sure. They are so evidently suited to one another. And, poor girl, she deserves some compensation after her disappointment."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### OVERSHADOWING.

SUMMER faded into autumn without any great change taking place in the situation. To all appearance Lilian had gradually reverted to the same habits and lines of thought which had occupied her attention before her nature was rippled by a new emotion. One new habit had, however, grown up, and this was that of taking long daily walks by herself. Her mother marked the change with approval. She thought it conducive to renewed health of mind and body. One thing was apparent to all who knew anything of Lilian's inner life, and that was that all of a sudden she had grown considerably older, not, as is usually the case, by the slow process of time, but by the much speedier application of a new experience. A month after Walter Beresford had left Bickley Mr. Beachwood received a letter from him. It said but little of his mother; but what little it did say only served to show how gravely and seriously ill she was. He spoke very warmly of the great kindness he had received at Misterton, and of pleasant reminiscences which would never pass away, which he could never forget, of the most enjoyable three weeks of his life. A great part of the letter was taken up with his appreciation of the rare

beauties of the surrounding country — beauties which might well overwhelm a rare and gifted mind on seeing Switzerland for the first time. The rare beauty of the lake with the deep blue of its waters, of the *châlets* nestling by the lake-side, and the everlasting mountains snow-crowned and ice-bound rising one above another. His letter concluded by saying that he had experienced the greatest kindness from friends his mother had made before his arrival. They could not doubt that these were the Battersbys. It was strange that he did not refer to them by name. One thing I have omitted—Mr. Beresford stated that he had written to resign his curacy at Atterley Edge. Mr. Wyncombe had very kindly excused him the customary three months' notice; and he should only return there, when his mother's health permitted, to pack up the things which he had left at his lodgings. He said nothing as to any plans for the future. Altogether, warm as the letter was in all kindly feeling towards themselves, there was an air of evident restraint about the whole, intangible in itself, but leaving an unpleasant effect of disappointment behind. It was, in a word, the letter of one who was more careful about what he did not say than what he did say. The letter found its way into the waste-paper basket; from there it found its way into Lilian's keeping. It was when the struggle came as to whether she should take that letter or not, that she first faced something like the true state of her own feelings.

Why should she take it? What was it to her more than any other of the countless letters her father received? It was unmaidenly. She tried to reason

with herself; it was of no use. She trembled when the parlour-maid approached the basket in which the letter lay, and she carried it off almost before her very eyes. I believe Lilian would have carried it off before her mother's eyes rather than have lost it for ever. It is hard to see, looking at the thing rationally, not to say philosophically, what there is in a sheet of paper with some very commonplace remarks upon it, expressed in writing which a master of the art would consider execrable; and yet to Lilian that sheet of note-paper was replete with a mixture of feeling composed half of pleasure, half of pain, but which nothing would induce her to relinquish. This period of her life was very bitter to Lilian. She felt that she had lost much self-respect. She had come under the influence of an over-mastering, irresistible influence, which all her canons of feeling and taste, and even principle, told her were wrong, and yet it was irresistible, and that was an end of it. What reminiscence, then, had she of her last interview with Walter Beresford? She had not spoken to him again after they parted the night of the storm. The following day was Sunday. He left Bickley on the Monday. How, then, had they parted, apparently, and, to all appearances, for a day or two, really, perhaps, for ever? They had seen much of each other that day. They knew more of each other's inner—I was going to say inmost, but I refrain—feelings than they had ever done before; and yet the recollection Lilian had of the day was anything but satisfactory.

At one time the young clergyman seemed more than a friend, at others less than one. It was just as

if he was tethered—tied by one foot to a post. When he got a certain distance away he felt the check, and went back to his post again. This feeling of restraint had been strongest the last half-hour after dinner. Lilian had been playing something from her favourite Mendelssohn at the piano in the half light. Walter Beresford was by her side, sitting on a low settee; the others were grouped by the window talking, almost out of ear-shot. It was just the time and the light which demands confidences. Both felt very near to one another. Walter Beresford said some things dangerously near love-making. Suddenly he drew back almost as if he had been stung, and shortly after summoned his friend to his side, and they left. The memory of all this haunted Lilian. She felt instinctively his was not the nature to say one thing and mean another. And yet all this was hard to understand and explain to her own satisfaction. Had he thought her rude on the day of the fête? Did he cherish any ill feeling for the snub she had administered? She certainly had been rude, she admitted that, but she had tried to make the *amende honorable.*

It was not a satisfactory explanation, but it seemed the only one. She little knew how some one had sown dark seed—seed so insidious that it looked, as did the tares of old, like real wheat—in his heart. Many a life has been ruined, many a happiness irretrievably marred, by this devil's seed sown by the oftentimes fair hand of the devil's daughters.

It came bitterly home to Lilian, this thought—one of the bitterest that high-minded women are

ever subject to—namely, that she had given herself to another even though he did not know it, when he had not asked her. And yet it must often and often be the case where it is true love. For either the woman declines because she does not love, or she accepts and loves at a moment's notice, or she loves before, and the acceptance—the engagement—the betrothal—only proclaims it to him and the world. I am speaking now of marriages which are heaven-born. I have nothing to say about marriages *de convenance.* They generally come from elsewhere. Lilian never till now learnt the full beauty of the Psalms ; they were her nightly solace. There was never yet a human affliction that they did not touch and help to alleviate. She felt very much shut up into herself. It was not the very least part of her trouble that she was shut off from making a *confidante* of her mother.

Those two women, however, had a trouble which they did fully share and discuss together as the summer drew to a close, and that was the health of the husband and father they loved so much. There could be no disguising the fact that the Reverend Llewellyn Beachwood was not the man he had been.

Twice over fainting fits came over him, not so severe as that one which had brought Walter Beresford into their more intimate acquaintanceship, but quite severe enough to be very alarming. He was evidently much more feeble, and went less and less outside his own precincts. Lilian felt how wrong it was that this trouble, distressing as it really was to her, preyed upon her less than the other. About this

time Ralph Fairlegh and his wife went abroad, and Lilian really seemed to be without an intimate friend.

She kept saying to herself, Oh! that she could only live this year over again, and live it differently; and yet she could not but feel that it was all manifestly ordered, as, after all, so little of what had happened depended on her volition. She failed to see in what particular points she had done wrong or acted unwisely; and yet she felt that things had drifted on from bad to worse. All this anxious disquiet and inward communing aged Lilian, and made her from a careless girl into a thoughtful, dependable woman. It was unpleasant experience and training, and yet, could she have looked into the future, it was perhaps just the training she needed.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A NEW EXPERIENCE.

SEPTEMBER had come in golden brown. The harvest was well-nigh gathered in. The yellow, sunburnt wheat stood here and there in shocks like eager village folk—true gossips all—laying their heads together over the last piece of news. The hare-bell raised itself from off the ground on feeble stalk, swayed by every current and breath of wind. Even Lilian's light footmarks on the grass in the early morning seemed to destroy thousands of phosphorescent diamond spangles at every tread. The talk had become a common one in the village that the Rector was failing; but only two loving, anxious, sorrow-haunted women and the good village chirurgeon knew how much it was the case.

No one but those who have passed through a similar time know what it is to look upon one they have ever leant upon, and feel that the time is coming, nay, is almost come, when they will be able to lean upon him no longer. The very leaves, turning to bronze and ochre and gold before they fell, seemed full of the breath of decay; the gathered harvest was typical of another ingathering of other grain. Both these women inwardly felt all this; both felt that the other shared the same external sympathy of

nature; and yet neither discussed it much with the other—perhaps the feeling was too deep for words—perhaps to speak of it seemed to bring the dreaded something nearer. I think both reasons were interwoven together. On an early day in September, Lilian sallied forth about eleven in the morning for a walk. How wondrous and passing sweet she looked! The foreshadowing of sorrow, the occasion of deeper thought and more inward musing, only enhanced her beauty. It lent a look of far-away pensiveness and feeling to her grey eyes, and an added nobility to her whole face. She carried a light black basket in her hand, in case any strange mushrooms invited her to gather them as she passed. They were a delicacy to which her father was extremely partial. Unfortunately, the children had gathered most of them, uninvited, in the very early morning.

Let us go with her. Lilian turned to the right on leaving the green house, skirted the lawn, and then passed along the brow of the hill of which we have so often spoken. Here Walter Beresford had first seen her; but she did not know it, and therefore her thoughts could not go back to that time. She did think of the sunset time; of the picnic under the trees; of the times they had walked under the shade of the beech-trees together. It seemed years ago, as if it had all happened in the days of her youth; and now she felt so very old. Could it have all taken place this very summer, whose warm breath still lingered in the air, and rested on her cheek? She could hardly believe it. Leaving the Ridge Brow, with only one look to the distant Welsh hills, she descended to the road which traversed its foot almost at right angles.

One way, turning to the right, as I have already said, would have brought her by a somewhat circuitous route to Bickley. She turned to the left, however. The road was cut deep down in the earth—more like a watercourse, old and dried up, it seemed than a road. Its two sides were covered with moss and with strawberry roots; and above were bracken and blackberry shoots. After going for some distance along the winding of this lane she came upon a sort of common, stretching for some long distance before her, but narrow, bounded by arable and pasture land. Here and there geese were to be seen wandering at sweet will, ready to crane their necks, and look as suspicious and unneighbourly as possible when she approached. As she entered the common on her left was a gate leading into a field; several young pigs—all young things are pretty, even young pigs, except when they are too small—were guarding it on the farther side. They were evidently eager to come and disport themselves on the common; but there was the gate. They eagerly, and at the very top of their voices, besought Lilian to open it for them. She turned aside to look at them. She loved all animals; but, notwithstanding their noisy entreaties, did not feel justified in disturbing the decision of their master and owner, that they were better where they were. Turning from them, she pursued her way onwards, hardly knowing which way she went. Running down the common, almost its whole length, was a stream, broad and shallow. It murmured to her pleasantly, as if it would have liked to be company to her in her loneliness. The crows, too, hovered overhead, and wheeled, and cawed, and came down

into the long coarse grass, and balanced themselves on the tiniest twigs of the tallest trees, which—the twigs, not the trees—swayed under them, as if they would break, only they did not. In the distance, but far in front, were scattered here and there, at long intervals, cottages of the poorest description—mostly those of people who kept themselves alive no one knew how. They were the owners of the geese and of the few lean cows which were dotted about here and there. Lilian was lost in a vision. She often walked now as one in a dream. Her thoughts were of the future, but coloured much by the past. Gradually the truth was forcing itself upon her that the old home was on the verge of dissolution ; that there was a great change pending in her life. Oftentimes at night, in the silence of her own chamber, she would fling herself on to her knees and bury her face in her hands and weep bitterly—smothering the long-drawn sobs, lest any of the household—her father and mother most of all—should hear them. To-day she ever and anon clenched her hands, and bit her lip, but no tears stood in her grey eyes or wet the long lashes. To the young, any immediate sorrow looming before them seems impassable, as if the brightness can never again return; the light is gone out for ever. They cannot imagine that the time will ever come that their heart will be as joyous, their step as light, their hope as confident as it has been before.

It is a counterpoise to the fact that their hope, when all before them seems bright, cannot realize that their expectations will not all be realized and their bright forecasts all fulfilled. In after years men and women learn that time modifies all things.

It lessens, soothes, softens grief. It teaches that hope and fruition are two very different things. So we meet both sorrow and joy with a calmer, soberer greeting, knowing that the Hand which mellows joy can likewise soften sorrow. Lilian was young, and sorrow new to her. And though she was brave beyond most women, there was a heavy feeling of hopelessness and hollowness about her heart, and a rarely beautiful wistfulness about her eyes.

She walked this morning farther than usual across the common, with that sharp quick step which is the accompaniment alike of brimming delight and of busied questioning thought. Suddenly her attention was caught by a heavy splashing drop of rain. It woke her out of herself—out of her blind reverie. She looked up. The heavens were black with clouds. A storm had gathered precipitately overhead. She half-turned to go back, but retreat was impossible. Before she could get to the edge of the common she well knew she would be drenched from head to foot. What was she to do? She looked round anxiously; near at hand was a cottage—if such it can be called—half log hut, half cabin. She hesitated for a moment. She had never walked alone so far before. The cottages on the common—they were few and far between—had an evil name. The men, as a rule, were poachers, or even worse; the women foul-mouthed, dirty, and destitute of all religion. However, there seemed no choice, so she advanced briskly and tapped at the door. She could not help wondering as she did so how the fabric all kept together. There was a large zig-zag crack in the side wall. The chimney, from which a volume of

black smoke was issuing, evidently proceeding from either a peat or a green wood fire, seemed eager to tumble at the slightest excuse. The door had no latch, only a string. The whole was exposed to every wind of heaven which blew across that bleak, dreary, desolate common.

A feeble voice said "Come in!" Lilian entered.

At first she could see nothing. The smoke which escaped from the chimney was only a sample of the less well-behaved portion of the same which filled the tiny, single, downstairs room of the cottage. Lilian coughed. She was not quite certain whether there was any one in the room besides herself; but some one had certainly answered her knock. At last she recovered the use of her sight, after a vigorous fit of coughing. At the farthest corner of the room, behind the angle of the fireplace, the ingle nook, lay a girl of eighteen or thereabouts. Her bed was a mattress, stretched on the floor, and two blankets, between which she lay. Her eyes were open wide. She could see plainly enough. The atmosphere of the room was that to which she was habitually accustomed. It may well be questioned, however, whether her eyes had ever before rested on so strange and lovely a vision as they rested on now. She was evidently far gone in consumption. Not that her cheeks were hectic, they were hollow and pallid. But the large brown eyes, lustrous and bright, told their tale clearly enough.

By her side was a cup standing on the ground half full of goat's milk. She was evidently too overwhelmed with surprise and astonishment to speak. Lilian stood and looked at her for a moment. It

had been a very nervous and trembling hand which had pulled the string, and thereby obeyed the order of the sick girl. But all the nervousness and strangeness of feeling was swept away, overwhelmed in that one strong, overpowering, womanly feeling of intense compassion, sympathy, and pity. Had any one else been in the room she was going to have asked permission to shelter during the storm, which now beat violently. As it was Lilian only said:

"Don't be frightened; I was on the common; I have come in out of the storm; may I?" The girl only stared fixedly at her in reply. Possibly she did not understand the purport of the words; more probably her sense of seeing was so intense for the moment that it swallowed up all control over her other senses.

After a moment or two spent by this strange pair in looking at one another, Lilian drew a rickety, low, three-legged stool to the side of her new friend, and took one of the two wan lean hands which hung out of the bed into her own. The touch roused the girl, and brought back her scattered reasoning faculties. Then she spoke not in Welsh, as Lilian had half expected, but with an Irish accent, although there was little to denote her nationality in the words themselves.

"Be you a lady? Be you from these parts?" and then, with a long-drawn sigh, "I be gruesome bad. How bonny you do look, to be sure!" The sentences came quickly one after another. The admiration was real enough. Lilian was full of sympathy. It is a bond which unites souls, however sundered far apart by outward circumstances. She soon drew

from the girl that her mother was dead; and her father chopping wood in the outhouse or shed outside.

Half an hour passed away, and Lilian and the girl had struck up quite a friendship. The former had discovered that Kathleen Redmond—such was the girl's name—had been to a Protestant school years ago, and some smattering of the old impressed truths yet remained. How hard it is to drive out traces of those early youthful lessons and teaching! But her father believed in nothing. No one ever saw her but him. They had no Bible. Lilian's heart ached to think that such a thing should be possible in Christian England. She promised to return next day and bring her Bible, and to come often to see her. She had hardly made the promise before Mr. Redmond entered the room. Had he come in before, she most probably would have thought twice before making the promise. He certainly was no beauty to look at—a dirty face surmounted with a paper cap, such as are worn by factory hands, long arms, bare, and covered with dark hair a broad chest, fierce little eyes, set too near together, with brows which met overhead; he was very tall, thick-set, and slightly bow-legged. Kathleen rapidly explained the situation to him partly, in English, partly in Irish. He only grunted in reply, and turned to put another log on the fire. The storm had ceased. Lilian said a few words by way of adieu. She was uncertain how to treat Mr. Redmond. At last she offered him her hand. He took it, looked at it lying in marked comparison inside his own for a moment, then he laughed gruffly and turned away. Lilian was very thankful when she

found herself on the common again, nevertheless her heart was lighter than it had been for weeks. From that time she paid almost daily visits to the cottage. Sometimes Mr. Redmond was at home, sometimes he was out.

When he was there she at first did not like to read, but the dying girl would take no refusal. However, he took little or no notice of her; and so she gathered courage. After a time he took to being at home more regularly, and whistled more *sotto voce* than before. He looked at her, too, although he rarely spoke, not unkindly from under his ugly dark brows. Lilian, although she did not know it, had found what she was looking for—her mission.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A LONG FAREWELL.

BETWEEN Sir Lionel Battersby and Walter Beresford, during the weeks that had passed since the latter's arrival at Thun, a strong, warm, lasting friendship had sprung up. Over Walter Beresford a great change had passed. A great, passionate longing which has to be controlled ; a deep, heartfelt, intense sorrow which has to be met—these, the two greatest of sombre influences which affect mankind, had come upon him at once. It would have hardened some men into flint. It only softened and purified what before had been hard in his nature. The struggle which fought itself out within him, during that long solitary journey, was harder to him than to many men. He had ever been one to say duty must come first—aught else far away second ; that the affections must learn to be subject to the higher power of the will. And now the time had come for action—to carry the training and habits of thought in which he had schooled himself for years into practical life ; and he found himself, instead of a strong, brave man, as he had always expected to be, only a weak child.

The poison which had been administered had

sunk deep into his soul. He had been told, remember—and Lilian's own evident sensitiveness only corroborated the story—that Lilian Beachwood had loved Sir Lionel Battersby; he had been told, too, that Sir Lionel had acted very badly in the matter. He wholly credited the former; he was in doubt about the latter. On the one hand, Lilian did not seem the girl to be trifled with, and, on the other, the Sir Lionel of Miss Wyncombe was not, could not be, the Sir Lionel his mother spoke of so warmly. The latter was one upon whose judgment—especially judgment of men—he could fully rely, and that she deemed Sir Lionel Battersby one of the noblest of men was apparent from every letter she penned.

But for himself there seemed no loop-hole of escape. Had Lilian been free he was too poor to speak; and now she was shut off from him for ever. He could not but confess to himself, as mile after mile separated her from him, that he loved Lilian with all his heart. Not a love of the senses only, which another form might divert and change; not the love of admiration and respect only, which is higher, and purer, and deeper, but not much more lasting than the other; but that love which true man never gives but to one woman. It is the gift of himself, and that, once bestowed, can never be taken back and given over again. It was something to know that all must be for the best—[illegible] the training was severe the soldier must [illegible] his was no soul drifting anchorless on the [illegible] The chain was sometimes hidden by th[illegible] the tether to the rock was none the l[illegible] sure. Had it not been for this, he migh[illegible]

ready to cast himself into the channel which boiled, and surged, and yawned at his feet.

When he reached his destination, somewhat of the stillness of exhaustion—which some mistake for peace—had settled down over his soul. He had eaten little and slept less by the way. Sir Lionel Battersby met him at the station. He was not the man Walter expected to see—square and massive, and somewhat grey. He had pictured a younger man.

The baronet had recovered from the sprain, which, thanks to the best of nursing, had healed more rapidly than was at first expected. He was staying with his mother at the Grande Hotel de Thun, very near the apartments Mrs. Beresford occupied. Lady Battersby did most of the nursing, although professional assistance had been secured. Walter Beresford found his mother very ill. She was lying on a sofa. He knelt by her side.

She drew his head down, and took it in both her arms, and kissed his hair. After that those three watchers shared the fatigue between them; Walter Beresford taking most of the night duty. He slept but little even during the day. A very few days served to dissipate even the very shadow of a doubt as to Sir Lionel Battersby. That he was the very soul of tender, manly honour—a true gentleman—was apparent in his face, in his every word, in every sentiment and feeling he expressed.

They frequently walked out together amongst the eternal mountains. Walter preached for the chaplain, who was away on business, at the little English church. The truths—old truths it is true, but never set before them in the same way—came home to

many of the small English community who had never felt them before; and the recollections of the lovely scene were mingled with holier remembrances of lessons which never afterwards passed out of their lives. Lionel Battersby was one of the number. He and his mother had stayed far longer than they had ever intended—how constantly our actions are overruled for higher purposes—first through the baronet's accident, and then because they would not leave Mrs. Beresford, who had been such a true friend to them, and whom they had learnt to love. Those two thanked God that they had been compelled to stay ever afterwards.

One topic was never touched upon between the two friends—the topic generally more absorbing, especially abroad, than all others—that of home. Sometimes the young clergyman spoke of Atterley Edge, and the experiences of his work there; but Bickley and Misterton were never mentioned between them. They might never have existed. It often very much surprised Sir Lionel that this was the case. To himself the subject was one to touch upon which would have been like roughly exposing an old wound. But surely there could be no reason why Walter Beresford was so systematically silent on the subject.

He often puzzled this all over to himself. Once or twice something very nearly led the conversation up to the avoided topic; but the avoidance on both sides was as marked as possible. At first—and sometimes made his blood boil and his ears tin to think that fair girl and he should be comm property and common gossip—he imagined so

one must have told the clergyman what had happened. He knew many must know the whole circumstances. His courtship had been too marked, and his departure too sudden, not to be noticed and understood.

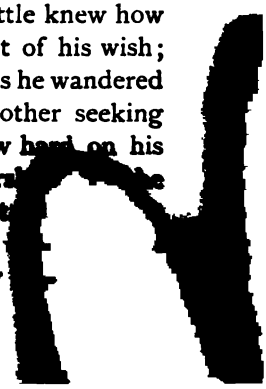
Gradually, however, the truth could not fail to force itself upon him that there was some deeper and more personal feeling involved in the reticence which Walter Beresford so carefully preserved. After much thought he came to the conclusion that the same thing which had happened to himself had likewise happened to his friend. It was, perhaps, somewhat natural that he should think this. Would he ever know how wide of the mark, and yet how near the truth, his conclusion was?

What, then, did Walter Beresford think was the true solution of the state of affairs which he had left behind him? He hardly knew what to think. He never doubted, strange to say—perhaps he dare not let himself do so—that Lilian had really loved Sir Lionel; and no wonder, he often said to himself; he could only imagine some terrible mistake, which time alone could clear up, had separated them for a time.

Meantime, it was wonderful to see how tenderly he nursed his mother. He could not but see that she grew weaker from day to day; and he set himself resolutely to try and face that future he felt to be inevitable. The heart of Lady Battersby and that of her son went out to the young man. His tender care, his rare gentleness, the quiet devotion of his manner; above all, the reality which lay at the very root of his life—all these they saw and respected,

and appreciated at their full value. As September drew to a close it was evident Mrs. Beresford's end drew near too. She died on the evening of the last day of the month.

Her bed was placed where she could see the sun set over the eternal snow of the hills, which glowed and sparkled in the rays of light. Her hands were clasped in prayer, and then she sank as if in sleep; and it was not till that strange stillness had pervaded the room—which many aver is different from all other quiet, and is only to be found in a chamber which the last dread messenger has entered—that those three knew that the one who had made the fourth had gone out into the eternal stillness, never to return. They laid her, covered with white flowers, in a plain wood coffin hard by the little church; and when the final blessing had been said, and the little company had dispersed, and only Walter remained leaning with his head resting on one hand against the buttress of the church, he felt that all the brightness, and love, and hope of this life had gone out for him for ever. How much he wished that the hand which had lulled her to rest might have laid him there in quiet by her side! He little knew how near he would soon be to the fulfilment of his wish; and yet it was not to be. For two months he wandered about aimlessly from one place to another seeking rest and finding none. The lines grew hard on his face; the angles became sharp and harsh [illegible] returned home to Atterley Edge to set [illegible] order, before leaving the old sphere [illegible] duties: as for plans, he was too weary [illegible] thing at all.



My father and I were sitting one morning in October over our breakfast. My father was looking over the *Times*. Suddenly he laid it down. "There is news of your friend, my boy, which more than accounts for his long silence. He has lost his mother."

"Oh, father," I said after a long pause, "I am so sorry! if ever man loved his mother, Walter Beresford did."

My father got up and walked to the window. His thoughts had gone back into the past—one loss had recalled another. Little more was said, but we both wrote that morning to Walter; I very lovingly and yet very haltingly, as I knew. We little knew how long it would be before those letters would ever reach him.

The news came to the household at the Rectory too. The Rector and his wife felt much for the young man in his great sorrow. As for Lilian, she poured forth floods of bitter tears in her own room—partly for him, partly for herself; partly of the present, partly of the future.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

IT was a great comfort to Lilian at this time that Kathleen Redmond demanded almost constant attention. The strength of the dying girl was fast passing away. She clung to Lilian with all the passionate love and devotion of her nature. No kind hands had smoothed her pillow or brushed out her hair. No gentle voice had stirred the inner recesses of her being with words of love before, and now that Lilian had come to her like a guardian angel, out of the pitiless storm, Kathleen Redmond laid at her feet all the tribute of heart and soul she had to give.

Lilian made her soups and jellies, and took them to her; and would sit by the hour by her side in the morning or early afternoon; always taking care to be safe across the common before dusk. The walk, with its enforced exercise, was about the best thing Lilian could have had; keeping her in good health, almost in spite of herself. At other times she was much alone. Her father, who grew visibly feebler day by day, demanded his wife's almost co[illegible] attention, and consequently the young girl w[illegible] much to her own devices. The organ had become her almost constant solace. Its de[illegible] tones seemed to speak to Lilian of some

fuller, deeper life beyond her own; something which affected her without actually mingling with her being. She hardly cared to define what it was. It was an influence which soothed the voice of anxiety, of disquiet, of unrest, which was muttering and murmuring within her. She was satisfied that there was such an influence, without inquiring whence it came. At times she sought the company of the lame boy at the cottage almost eagerly; at times she felt it would be pain even to see him. It seemed hard to her—and she murmured a little at it—that all the brightness of her life had suddenly gone out for ever—that a new need, a new craving, should have arisen in her nature only to be disappointed; and that all that was bright in her old life was darkened. All the old joyousness was passed away; and no new happiness offered itself to fill the place of what was slipping from her grasp. It is difficult for those who have seen much sorrow to realize how harsh and terrible it is when it comes to those who have been protected from every rough blast of the wind, and sheltered from even the faintest mutterings of the storm.

Life to Lilian before had been all bright, now it seemed all dark; and the darkness was all the worse for the brightness which had gone before. She had never looked lovelier than she did at this time. Since she had heard the news of poor Mrs. Beresford's death, she had worn a plain black dress, only relieved at the sleeves and collar by a touch of white. She little knew or cared, but it set her figure and the delicate beauty of her face off to the fullest perfection. No one asked her the reason. Perhaps they

had too much to do to notice the change. To Lilian at this time anything but the plainest of the plain, anything but black or white, would have seemed as very desecration.

One afternoon the maid brought her a message that a man wanted to speak to her. "Where is he?"

"In the kitchen, miss, and the cook she be looking after him and the spoons."

Lilian smiled; the first smile she had indulged in for weeks. "What, is he so very disreputable-looking? Who can it be?" She went into the kitchen. Standing moodily gazing into the fire was "Black Redmond," as his mates called him. He did not turn when she entered; apparently he was lost in abstraction, and had forgotten where he was.

Lilian paused a moment and looked at him. There was a look of tremendous brute power about the man; arms, chest, legs, shoulders, almost herculean in proportion. He must have stood more than six feet high. She had never taken such careful stock of him before. His eyes were deep-set and sunken, surmounted by thick bushy eyebrows, coarse, like iron-grey wire. Lilian touched his arm with her hand. Redmond mechanically put his hand to his hair.

"Her want 'ee! Her be calling for 'ee!" His words were laconic enough, but Lilian understood what he meant. The dying [illegible] worse.

"Is she very bad?" Black Redmond shook his head. He was not a [illegible] at any time, especially now, a[illegible]

Lilian was in doubt. The afternoon was drawing to a close. Would her mother permit her to go with this rough, dangerous-looking man across the common, with the prospect of an indefinite and protracted stay in the cottage? Lilian said nothing, but went off to seek her mother. Her whole heart was bent on going. Mrs. Beachwood at first refused point blank; but the nature of the case seemed so urgent, and Lilian so manifestly felt it her duty to obey the summons, that at last Mrs. Beachwood yielded. She came down to see the messenger.

There was something trusty beneath the savagery of the man's appearance and surroundings. Mrs. Beachwood said, "I don't know whether I am right in letting my daughter go; can I trust her in your hands, my man, and will you promise to see her back here to me safe and sound?"

Black Redmond slightly turned up the sleeve of his shirt. "It's meself would like to see the man that would touch her when Black Redmond was by her side!"

Lilian took a flask of port wine and a few biscuits —the latter for herself—and the two started together. The evening was coming on apace, and promised to be rainy. Lilian had her waterproof over her arm, to be ready for any emergency. They did not exchange a single unnecessary word between the Rectory and the hut, except when Lilian asked who was with Kathleen, and Redmond answered a woman from a neighbouring cottage.

In his rough way, however, Black Redmond took good care of Lilian, finding her the smooth places on the road, and helping her over difficulties. When

they reached the cottage Lilian saw in a moment that the poor girl was very near her end. Kathleen was sitting propped up in the bed; and every now and then her breath came in heavy gasping laboured sobs.

Lilian knew little of death, but she felt it must be very near. The poor girl had strength left to take up Lilian's hand and kiss it. Lilian bent over and kissed her on the forehead. As she did so she turned round and caught the father's eye fixed upon her. It was more like that of a faithful dog, after some caress of his master, full of dog gratitude, than of a human being. Lilian then knew for the first time how much this uncouth, almost harsh, certainly repulsive-looking man loved that poor girl. Her heart bled for him. She knelt down and repeated the twenty-third Psalm, and then the Lord's Prayer. The dying girl seemed satisfied and more restful. Two hours passed by. The wind had risen and the rain was falling. It reminded Lilian—although not nearly so stormy—of the first night when she had been driven for shelter into the hut. Black Redmond crouched, rather than sat, on the three-legged stool by the fireplace. The old woman, who had come in to look after the sufferer, had stretched herself on a sack at the foot of the bed. Lilian had repeated nearly all the texts she could think of that were suitable, and was resting at the end of the apology for a bed on which Kathleen lay a-dying. Pre[illegible] the girl seemed to rouse herself from the [illegible] stupor into which she had fallen. She calle[illegible] The only light in the cottage was that of two fi[illegible] tallow candles, which spluttered and only s[illegible]

make the darkness more visible. "Miss, will 'ee kindly pray that prayer again?" Lilian took the poor thin hand in hers and began again the Lord's Prayer. When she reached the words "Thy Kingdom come," the hand fell from her grasp; only the outer tenement of poor Kathleen Redmond lay on that rude couch of suffering; her spirit had gone to the God who gave it. When Black Redmond knew it was all over, he burst into an uncontrollable flood of bitter tears; while the old woman swayed herself to and fro, and uttered a long dismal wail. It was a great relief to the young girl when she found herself out in the open air, even with the rain beating in her face. Black Redmond walked by her side. She longed to say something to comfort him, but words failed her. Besides, it is not easy to talk in the blinding rain. When they came to the steep uphill of the Ridge Brow, near the end of the journey, Black Redmond, without a word, took her up in his arms and carried her. She was like a feather-weight in his grasp, and his foot seemed as sure in the dark as in the daylight. Perhaps he was more used to the former than the latter. She was very thankful, however, when he set her down again. When they reached the door Lilian held out her hand to him. He took it in both his, and said, "The Heavens above bless 'ee for your kindness to she!" Lilian only pressed his hand in response and said, "Good-night, God bless you!"

Then they parted; Lilian to have a hot posset, prepared by her loving mother's hands, and to go to bed, utterly weary; Black Redmond to the nearest river to throw himself in. And when he got there

something held him back. It was not fear. Black Redmond did not know what that was. Perhaps some holier instinct had entered into his soul during the weeks that Lilian had tended his poor Kathleen, and read to her out of her little Bible. At any rate, he went home, heartbroken as he was, to the old hut and his dead daughter.

Lilian lay and slept until the early morning. She was roused by that strange feeling of some one being in the room, which is indescribable, but which rouses sleeping people more than anything else—even actual noise. She roused herself and sat up. It was that darkest hour which precedes the dawn. Her mother stood at the foot of the bed, candle in hand. The light shone upon her face.

One glance told Lilian all she need know. The event which they had dreaded for weeks—which had hung like a leaden weight around their necks—which all the village felt was near at hand—had happened. Her father was dead. The Rector had gone to bed feeling more than usually well. In the night he roused his wife with the words, "My dear, I feel a pain; will you get me my medicine?" It was something Dr. Jones had prescribed for any sudden emergency or feeling of pain. Before Mrs. Beachwood could give it to him, he was dead!

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A HARBOUR OF REFUGE.

AFTER the death of her husband, poor Mrs. Beachwood seemed to utterly collapse. She was capable of no thought, no action, no sustained energy of any kind. My father came forward immediately, and did all that man could do to relieve the widow and the orphan of those necessary arrangements for the last sad rites. The family lawyer came and took up his abode with us; and he and my father managed matters pretty well between them. It seemed more convenient, than for him to go to Misterton Rectory. On some points, however, especially with regard to the future, the ladies had to be consulted. Lilian bore the brunt of all this. Her mother seemed to know nothing, and to care less. One point only she did decide—and on this point she was very determined—and that was, in future they must take up their abode in London. It was calculated that, what with insurances and other things, they would have about £250 a year, besides a few hundreds of ready money. To some people it would have been almost affluence. To Mrs. Beachwood, who had been accustomed to good style all her life, it seemed very penury. Of course they could not continue to live on at Misterton. That rarely works well. A clergy-

man's widow usually thinks her late husband's way the best; and every change which the new-comer makes must be for the worse. It is hardly likely that he will maintain the *status quo ante* exactly. Hence heart-burnings, and frequently a little centre of opposition. Mrs. Beachwood was too much of a lady to lend herself to anything of the kind. There was, however, another and further reason against their choosing any place in the country side. Both her family and that of Mr. Beachwood were well known. She felt it easier to go and live on diminished means among strangers than to do so amongst acquaintances and friends. Having come to this conclusion, she seemed to take no further interest in what was decided, or which part of London was chosen. All the minutiæ fell upon Lilian. My father at this time was a tower of strength to her. He had learnt to love her with all the affection he could have bestowed upon a daughter. It was sad to see the extreme listlessness which had fallen on the Rector's widow. The change was so sudden and complete from the energy she had ever displayed before. As week after week passed away Lilian almost longed for the move, in the hope that fresh scenes and fresh faces would rouse her mother back to something like her old self. The new responsibility which had devolved on the young girl had made a marvellous change in her character—a change for which the events of the last few months had been silently preparing her. What was weak and girl-like in her before had perceptibly strengthened and become womanly. She had always won love; she now commanded respect. I well remember a con-

versation which passed between my father and myself about this time. He had just been to London, and had secured a small house for Mrs. and Miss Beachwood in a southern suburb of the great Metropolis. That morning my father had communicated the result of his visit to the small circle at the Rectory. It was now afternoon—a glorious autumn afternoon—the winter was only coming; it had not come. My couch was drawn to the window. My father stood occasionally drumming with his knuckles on the pane.

"Boy, are you asleep?"

"No, father; dreaming, but not asleep."

"Do you know, I have been thinking about that poor girl! I never saw such a change in any one as there has been in her since I first knew her. She has grown suddenly like an old woman. It is not natural. I don't like to see it."

"Yes, it was so terribly sad about poor Mr. Beachwood."

"Ah," said my father, "I have begun to fancy of late that that business could not account for it all—sad as it certainly was. The change seems to me to have begun when we first heard the news of poor Mrs. Beresford's death. Do you think she thinks of *him* still? Has he anything to do with it?" With an emphasis on the word him.

"Yes, father, if you will have it, I believe she loves him with all her heart."

"So!" (It was my father's favourite exclamation when anything moved or excited him more than usual.) "What makes you think so, boy? Come, have not you dreamt it in one of your day-dreams?"

"No, father. I have watched her carefully whenever his name was mentioned; and I often talked of him to her, but however much she knew it was coming, she could not help changing colour, either from white to red, or from red to white."

"Yes, I believe you are right, that accounts for a good deal," assented my father. I was rather surprised to hear him say so. He was generally so very matter-of-fact. "What has become of Walter Beresford? Do you know?"

"No, I have written to him several times to Atterley Edge, but have received no answer. I believe he is still abroad. I wish Winslow were not abroad, too, or I would make him look Walter Beresford up. He is like a sleuth-hound, and would find him if he had got to the ends of the earth. I do not, however, know where to write to him. One thing I am sure of, Walter Beresford truly loved Lilian Beachwood; and if he loved her once, nothing would ever induce him to change."

"You are enthusiastic about him, boy. It was no virtue on the part of your friend. He simply could not help it. No one could."

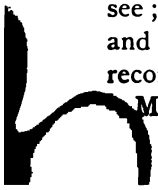
"Neither, father, could she help loving him," I fired up.

My father turned away, and strode out of the room. He seemed very cross with Walter Beresford for some reason or other; perhaps he was thinking of the offer he had made him, and its curt refus[al] and how different things might have been ha[d] been allowed to be a *Deus ex mâchina.*

The month of November was drawing to a [close]

when the time came for Lilian and her mother to leave their old home, and old associations and old friends behind them, to seek a new home amongst strangers. The leaves had fallen—a high wind had swept the last lingerers from the trees. All nature was preparing itself for its long sleep. It was perhaps better so. The parting was bad enough as it was, for both mother and daughter; but I think it could be borne better then than at any other time. It would be indeed hard to part with that lovely spot in the fresh joyousness of spring, or the golden beauty of glowing summer; even in early autumn. No! doubtless it was easiest, or perhaps I ought to say least hard, now that winter was close at hand. Now that Lilian was leaving it all, there was a touch of severe self-dissatisfaction at the bottom of her regret. How often had she dreamed of work in the great world, when work close by and within her grasp was lying neglected and undone. She seemed to see it all much more clearly now. How much might have been done in the village itself; but her visits to the common had opened her eyes to a much wider vista of work amongst its scattered, neglected community.

How much would she not have given now for opportunity to redeem the time, but it was denied to her! Together they—the mother and daughter—paid their last farewell visits to old garden seats; to the villagers, as many as they could bear to see; to the church, every nook and cranny of it; and finally, to the old tombstone with its fresh record.



My father accompanied Mrs. Beachwood and

Lilian to London, and then went to his hotel. Lilian had been bred and brought up wholly in the country. Quaint old Chester was the largest town she had ever visited. London perfectly bewildered her. They, of course, travelled by express train, and arrived in the dusk; but the glare of the constant stations they passed in a moment, as the train hurried through suburban London to its destination, sufficiently indicated the vastness of the place. Then there were the crowds of porters; rank after rank of cabs and hansoms; then the long drive through interminable streets in a fly, through which the cabman threaded his way with superhuman instinct, a last inquiry about the number, and they were there. The door was flung open. An old servant—Margaret—sent on before, stood in the open doorway; beyond could be seen the reflection of the red glare of the fire, in a side sitting-room off the narrow hall. A pleasant smell of buttered toast pervaded the house.

After the railway journey, the fatigue, the excitement, the noisy station, and the everlasting streets, it was something to have reached a haven which had somewhat, at any rate, of the inviting look of home about it. Lilian had had to keep up and be cheerful, and help to keep her mother up all through the journey. She was very thankful when she was safely in her own little room, and could fling herself down, unseen, by the bedside and have a good hearty cry. Poor child! she was not twenty-one yet.

Then she washed and brushed her hair, and went down to see her mother. And after they had had—

that most comforting and soothing beverage to a woman—a cup of tea, and the tea-things had been removed, and they were alone again, both felt a sense of relief and restfulness, such as they had not felt since husband and father had been taken from them.

I think, too, it always adds to the sense of comfort of people in a cosy room to hear the wind raging round the house outside. It makes us draw up to the fire and hug it closely. We know so well how bleak and uncomfortable it is without. And to-night the wind blew vigorously.

It was the last sound Lilian heard as she lay on the bed before she fell asleep, and it mingled with the railway trains in her dreams.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### MAUD WYNCOMBE'S DEVOTION.

NOVEMBER was drawing to a close when the young clergyman at last turned his face finally homewards—not that the word had any meaning—to Atterley Edge. He had been of late like one in a dream, eating little or nothing, but sleeping, strange to say, a good deal. To-day, he is drowsy in the extreme. A kind-hearted guard, who has seen him passing and repassing up and down the line, marvels at the wondrous change in one whose energy of deportment, and quick directness of step, has always been so marked and noticeable before. He sees the deep crape on the hat. He himself has known trouble; and he guesses mortal trouble of some kind has passed over the young clergyman. At the various stations the guard looks in to see how the passenger is getting on. He is neither asleep nor awake; and the guard, when he sees that far-away look in his eyes, feels a kind of responsibility. When they reach the station at Atterley Edge, the guard opened the door; but Walter Beresford showed no signs of preparation for alighting.

"Now, sir—Atterley Edge, sir—your destination, I think, sir." Walter Beresford turned his head slightly; but showed no signs of having understood what had been said to him. The guard saw it was

hopeless, so he called a porter—who recognized Walter Beresford—with the words, "Come and help the gentleman out, he appears to be ill."

The porter in answer, "Lor', it's Muster Beresford; how ill he do look, to be sure!"

They assist the clergyman on to the platform; but both have to support him, as he reels like a drunken man. A cab is called.

They put him in, and the porter—who has often sat under his preaching, and who feels for him from the bottom of his rough, kind heart—jumps in with him. The cab drives to the curate's old lodgings, where he was expected; and the kind old landlady takes in the situation at a glance, and her old lodger almost as quickly.

"Poor, dear soul!" she muttered to herself; "he do look as if he had got his death."

His bedroom and sitting-room were all on the ground floor *en suite;* a fire is soon blazing in the former apartment, and the landlady hurries the young man into bed. The porter, on his way back to the station, sends the doctor, a cheery man, about fifty, who always looks on the bright side of things, as a doctor should do. However, he sees the case to be serious—"Some kind of fever," he says to the inquiring landlady, "what kind I cannot tell at present; whatever it is, it has affected the brain, evidently. It was probably in a very weak state when this came on; and how very emaciated Mr. Beresford is! It is, of course, much against him. However, we must hope for the best. If you can manage to-night, I will get you a trained nurse to-morrow."

"Well, sir, I will do my best, sir; but I am just like an infant—begging your pardon, sir—in a sick room." The doctor smiled, and turned away. He thought better of Mrs. Jones's capabilities than she did herself.

Mrs. Jones waited till the young man slept; and then bidding her one domestic keep careful guard over the young man, and not to let him wake on any account—just as if she could help that if the patient wanted to do so—she sallied forth to carry the news up to the Rectory, and to cast some of the responsibility which weighed upon her, upon the Rector. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Wyncombe were at home, but Miss Wyncombe was; and she at once received the visitor. She was not at all a favourite with the people generally, and Mrs. Jones would have preferred telling her tale to either the Rector or his wife. However, they were not at home, so there was no help for it.

She began, almost breathless—"If you please, miss, Mr. Beresford has come home, and has took a fever, and is lying in my back bedroom, ground floor, as he used to occupy, poor dear young gentleman; and it's my belief he's got his death!" Maud Wyncombe was a strong-minded girl—a very strong-minded girl—but Mrs. Jones's volley of news came like a thunderclap. She turned very white, and grasped the back of the chair by which she was standing for support; but only for a moment. Then she rallied herself, and put Mrs. Jones through a course of sharp cross-examination, which elicited all she knew about the matter. When she had gleaned all the necessary information, she sent

Mrs. Jones away with the words, "Thank you for coming so promptly to tell us about the matter. I will acquaint my father with the circumstances when he comes in. I expect him shortly. Then I will come down and undertake the nursing myself." Mrs. Jones stared at her aghast. "You know," Maud Wyncombe went on, "I have a certificate from St. Swithin's Hospital, where I had six months' training. I will inform Dr. Heathcote, and will place myself under his directions. You may expect me before night." Mrs. Jones found herself out of the house before she found her tongue. She was utterly and beyond measure astonished. She compensated for her first surprised silence by soliloquizing all the way home. "Lor', how she do take the breath out of a body! Miss Wyncombe turn nurse and come to my house. They did used to say she was fond of him, but I never seed no signs as he was fond o' her."

Maud Wyncombe stood gazing into the fire. "This is my opportunity. The cards are playing into my hands. I should be a fool to let it slip. I know father will never consent to my going; if he does not, I shall go without his consent." Then some other thought seemed to cross her mind, for a strange smile—a cruel, hard smile—passed across her face. "How pleased you would be, Madam Lilian, if you could see the turn events have taken! Never mind, you have had your turn, now it is mine. It will be my own fault if the game falls into your hands again." Maud Wyncombe's smile was all gone now. She locked her hands together, until the blood was all squeezed out of them, and hissed

between her clenched teeth, "How I hate her! I hate her! I hate her!" Then she turned and went upstairs to put her things together preparatory to leaving the house.

When Walter Beresford had first come to Atterley, he had stayed for a fortnight at the Rectory. He had not been a week in the house before Maud, his Rector's daughter, loved him with all the intensity of her nature. She was one of those strong characters which seemed born to rule. She had hitherto ruled every one. She found she could not rule him, and this it was that at first attracted her to him. She was full of ambition. There seemed no prospect of satisfying it in her own person; but Walter Beresford, with his energy, talents, and ability, seemed just fitted to do what she was debarred by her sex from doing, and to be what she was debarred by her sex from being. Added to this, his beauty of face and figure, the manliness of his deportment, the feeling of strength which he conveyed to those about him, fired all the latent passion of her nature. I have said that to all women he was chivalrous in the extreme. He paid and showed more attention to chance women who crossed his path than most men to the object of their choice. Maud Wyncombe readily persuaded herself that her passion was returned and reciprocated. Every month strengthened her feeling towards him; but as time went by, as she grew to know him better, as she watched him with other women—how closely she did watch him luckily he never guessed—she learnt very nearly the truth. She could not persuade herself that she had even awakened a passing fancy which had passed

away. She felt that she was now, and had ever been, only as all other women to him. And to her he was everything—the whole world. It was a bitter cup, and she drank it to the very dregs. Truth to tell, Maud Wyncombe's nature was not at all the sort to attract a man like Walter Beresford. She had a rare beauty, it is true, much grace of a certain kind, and a talent in conversation which rendered her at all times a companion to be sought and appreciated; but she wanted just that one quality of softness which Lilian had to perfection, without which no one would ever win Walter Beresford's heart, and of which Maud Wyncombe had not a single iota. I have said that in course of time the harsh, cruel truth forced itself on her mind, that she made no progress, that she never had made any progress with the young curate, who, as she promised to herself, if only she had the direction of his future, would be an Archbishop at least some day. She could hardly believe it. She looked at herself with calm scrutiny in the long looking-glass in her wardrobe, and asked what was lacking? "Surely she was beautiful enough? surely she had grace enough?" So she had, only it was that of the panther. She had had her own way all her life, and now, just when she wanted it most, of course it was denied to her. She said it must be fate, and if it was fate she would conquer it, or die in the attempt.

Such had been the state of affairs up to the time when Walter Beresford had gone into Glebeshire. Maud Wyncombe knew that at Atterley she had had no rival. She had kept the most careful watch over

the young man; and even her jealous eyes had discovered nothing to arouse her apprehensions. He went to Glebeshire, and some foreboding told her that mischief was on foot. An excuse offered, and she followed him—as probably her woman's ingenuity would have devised some expedient for following him, if there had been no excuse ready to hand. When she set eyes on Lilian Beachwood, that first night at the Rectory, she felt instinctively that mimic warfare must be exchanged for real, downright battle. As in the days of chivalry, the shield had been struck with the sharp end of the spear, the summons had been proclaimed. The battle was *à outrance*. The end would be life—or death.

It was some time before her father and mother returned. Maud spent the time in making the few necessary preparations. She laid out her hospital nursing dress: blue serge, large white apron, and neat cap. It was becoming to her dark beauty, and she knew and felt it. She was ready before the time. Her few necessaries were placed in a light black travelling-bag. Then she moved restlessly about the house. Maud Wyncombe had always had her own way with both father and mother; they were neither of them of very determined nature. Where she had got her rare determination, self-will, and energy from was a puzzle to every one. Perhaps it came from some far-away ancestor, and had gathered extra force by skipping some gene[illegible] But often as she had had her own way, she [illegible] was a different occasion from any that ha[illegible] before. Her father would object, decidedly [illegible]

she knew that; but go she must and would. She would be sorry to have a final breach with her parents, who thought no one like her; but all the passion of her nature centred in Walter Beresford, and she would give up everything for him if need be—friends, even the very nearest and dearest; reputation, life, even honour.

There was a ring, steps in the hall, a hand on the dining-room door. The Rector and Mrs. Wyncombe had arrived. Maud advanced to meet them. She was a trifle paler, her heart beat fast, but she was quite calm and collected. Her father greeted her with some trivial sentence about being glad to get home, or something to that effect; but Maud took no heed, in fact she did not hear what he said. Her business had to be told all the quicker that it was unpleasant. Besides, she was anxious to be off and to get to her work.

"Father, I have had Mrs. Jones here from Wyndham Terrace, and she has brought rather startling news. Mr. Beresford has come home, and has brain fever. He is at her house."

Mr. Wyncombe was a tall, spare man, with long white whiskers, and bushy white brows, particularly gentlemanly in appearance, deportment, and voice. Mrs. Wyncombe was a little woman, who smoothed her dress down with her hands, and always said "ditto." If two people disagreed and expressed opposite opinions, she always said "ditto" to them both. People always said Mrs. Wyncombe was extremely amiable and very opposite to her daughter, which was no doubt true.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed the Rector, "I am sorry

to hear that. Poor young man! Brain fever; very bad business. I am very sorry; I will go and look after him to-night, or the first thing to-morrow morning, and see what help we can give."

Maud Wyncombe's answer came sharp between her teeth. Her voice shook slightly, in spite of her resolution. She was anxious not to make the matter appear too important to her father.

"I am going down to the house to-night, father. Mrs. Jones is quite helpless as far as nursing is concerned, although she is quite able to take the heavy work. I am the only properly trained nurse in the place, at any rate that Mr. Beresford would put up with. She will be very glad of my assistance, and I have promised to go."

"You have promised to go and nurse Beresford! You don't mean to say so. Of course you will do nothing of the kind. Why, what would people say! The whole parish would ring with it. It would create a public scandal. I see you have got your things on; you may go and take them off at once." The Rector was very angry. He had never spoken so sharply to his daughter before. Maud, however, had fully expected this, and even more. On some points her father was very particular, and at all times he was a good deal swayed by public opinion, and what the world thought. He turned to his wife. "Marian, you agree with me, I feel sure." Mrs. Wyncombe of course did agree with him. She always did. That did not, however, in the least prevent her agreeing with Maud too.

"Yes, dear. Of course you are quite right. I cannot imagine whatever you can be thinking of,

Maddy." Her mother was the only one who ever called her daughter by a pet name. Somehow pet names don't seem to fit some people, least of all characters like that of Maud Wyncombe.

"I am sorry, father, I cannot see it in the light you do. I think you will not, if you consider the matter for a moment. I go to any bedside, not as the Rector's daughter, or as Maud Wyncombe, but merely as a nurse where she is needed."

"And who do you think," said the Rector, angrily, "will believe such sophistry as that? I tell you no daughter of mine shall go on such an errand."

"I am not a child, father, without a will and a judgment of my own. There are some points on which I must exercise the former, and abide by the latter. This is one of them. If you withhold your permission I must go without it."

Maud spoke these words even more slowly and distinctly than she had done what had gone before; but the effort was very great. Her face was blanched white, and her hands and knees perceptibly trembled.

"Mother, have you nothing to say?"

Poor Mrs. Wyncombe was all in a tremor; she really agreed with her husband, but she was decidedly afraid of her daughter.

"Well, my dear, I see with your father, and I feel for you; and I do think we had all better wait until to-morrow morning, and see what turns up."

Maud turned away.

"Well, father, I must be going. Good-bye! won't you kiss me before I go?"

But her father only turned away and strode out of

the room. She had never seen him so angry in her life before.

The young girl took her bag and went out into the night. When she had got some little distance from the house, she leant up against some railings for support; she felt inclined to faint for some minutes, but the cool night air fanned her temples, and helped to brace her nerves. After all she was only a woman, although a very determined one. Her one thought as she walked along was, "I wonder whether she would have done as much for him? I don't believe it. I don't believe it."

When she reached Mr. Heathcote's house, she fortunately found him at home. Her task with him was comparatively easy. She had worked under him before, and he knew her to be a careful, attentive, and skilled nurse. This was far more important to him than any other consideration. The rest was her look-out, and her parents'.

She was somewhat of a favourite with the old doctor. He regarded her with kindly gaze through his spectacles as he gave her the necessary instructions.

"It is likely to be a long business, young lady."

"I shall not tire."

"Very well, at any rate, if you do, your help now will give us time to look round a little."

In a few minutes Maud Wyncombe was dressed in her nursing apparel, and standing by the bedside of her patient. She could hardly believe that there, lying before her, was handsome Walter Beresford. His face was pinched, and covered with whiskers;

his beard was of three or four days' growth; his hair, uncut for months, fell over his temples and overshadowed his brows; great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead; one long thin hand lay along the bed—so long, so thin. He was in a restless, troubled sleep. Maud Wyncombe was prepared for some change—not for so much as this. She flung herself down by the bed, and burst into a passionate flood of tears. Then she took the long thin hand and covered it with kisses. It seemed to rouse him, for he said, "Oh! mother, mother, it is so hot!"

Maud Wyncombe sought for Mrs. Jones.

"Are you sure he is not dying, Mrs. Jones?" There was a passionate intensity in her voice that could not be mistaken.

"No, miss, the doctor said there would likely be no change for days."

And so it proved.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### IN A LONDON SUBURB.

LILIAN'S feelings were very mingled when she awoke the morning after their journey. She had partly the feeling that all was left behind, and yet she was not wholly without that feeling of excited expectation, so natural to a girl of twenty suddenly placed in a new sphere and amidst new associations, of which she knew nothing, and therefore which might be anything. The house the Beachwoods occupied was the second in a terrace, standing in a side street, with a church in front, dividing it from the main road. A narrow strip of garden divided the front door from the street. Mrs. Beachwood seemed brighter when they met at breakfast; and the cosy fire, well-laid table, and bright, warm, red curtains were not without their effect upon both ladies.

Every one knows what it is to have the unpleasant experience of going into a new house. Nothing is where you want it. Little useful things, which have hitherto been so unobtrusive that one has never properly recognized their existence, or estimated them at their true value, as administering not only to our comfort but as numbered amongst our actual needs, are thrown into glaring relief by having been forgotten. All these have to be got, and if you are

in a new neighbourhood the shops have first to be sought and found where each article can be most advantageously obtained. Ironmongers, especially, seem to have a habit of concealing themselves in unlikely places and round impossible corners, probably trusting to their necessity to bare existence that their customers will have the ingenuity to find them out.

It was three weeks before Lilian knew exactly where to find everything, and was quite certain no new contingency was likely to arise for which she had not provided. The shop people were beginning to know her, and she them. She was almost sorry when the settling time was over; it had afforded a stimulus and excitement to her mother, and an occupation, mental and physical, to herself. Now she began to feel the days utterly wearisome, dull and heavy. She had drunk in, all her life, the very freshest air of mountain and valley, and now she had come to make trial of a London atmosphere at its very worst, when the fog hung over everything like a dense yellow pall. She had been used to plenty of walking exercise; to life in a garden amidst the scents of nature's sweetest growths; and here there was nowhere to walk except up the street and down the street, jostled by busy crowds, all eager to get their respective day's work and present business done; and the flowers were represented by a few huddled, sickly, unhappy specimens on barrows and carts at frequented corners. No one called upon them. You may live all your life in a London suburb and nobody know you, and be ignorant even of the name of your next-door neighbour. Even

the clergyman of the church opposite, who, however, lived in a better quarter some distance away, had not yet found them out. On Sundays Lilian missed her old employments very much indeed; and the church and its services were anything but to her liking; but her mother rarely went out even to service, except on communion Sundays, and Lilian did not feel inclined to seek alone fresh spiritual "fields and pastures new." The Reverend Mr. Harrison was of that almost dead-and-gone ultra-evangelical type, which seems to combine within it all that is antagonistic to that growth of taste and feeling which has certainly developed itself in all classes of the English nation in these later times. The service was almost wholly devoid of music; the hymns were drawling, long, and without cadence; the prayers were gabbled over and the lessons ill-read; but the sermon was the climax of all—lengthy, discursive, unpractical, full of anathema and denunciation, without any real helpfulness to those fighting the battle of life in the arena below. All this was utterly distasteful to Lilian. She had no wish or desire—in fact she had never seen, and therefore had acquired no taste—for an ornate ritual and an elaborate service, but she had been used to brightness and cheerfulness, to good singing and a kindly sermon, and there was nothing of all this in the church of St. Andrew Underhill, opposite to which the Beachwoods lived, and under whose spiritual shadow Lilian seemed destined for some future time to abide. The church itself was suitable to the service, massive and dark, suggestive of much mortal defilement coming within its walls; and the congregation, of a

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] half-apologetically, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

experiences at Misterton. She had never dreamed of a squalor, a filth, a misery, a hopeless degradation of mind, and body, and estate such as this. Corners of the streets, each adorned with the shady bar of some low beer-shop with its attendant being in woman's shape, and an apology for woman's dress, counting her few last miserable coppers on the doorstep, to see how many more maddening drinks she can purchase with them; or the still worse brightness of the shining gin-palace, with its row of carts and of patient horses waiting for their senseless masters, who are rapidly turning themselves into beasts inside. And the houses—abodes of filth, and misery, and dirt, and degradation, and sin; squalid, ill-kempt children playing outside, or on the filthy doorsteps. Families huddled together until every breath of breathable air is exhausted and all sense of decency is lost; and children are nurtured to be, if possible, more degraded and degrading than the parents themselves. If you have ever been into a low London street, even in the day-time, you will have some idea of the sensation it gave Lilian on seeing such a sight for the first time. Heaven prevent you and her from seeing it by night! The sight, somehow, had a strange fascination for her; now and again she would try and act the good Samaritan to the children, but the task was not an easy one, nor did they respond to her efforts in the least. There must have been something strangely incongruous to a casual onlooker in the sight of Lilian threading her way through these back streets at Underhill. She looked so fair, and pure, and ethereal, set off by her black dress and sealskin

jacket; while all her surroundings were so grim, and gruesome, and earthly, that the one only served to throw the other into the boldest relief possible. One day, some weeks after their arrival at Underhill, Lilian saw a sight which sent a shudder all down her frame, and frightened her ever afterwards from venturing down into these quarters again. It was not an unusual sight any the more for that. Probably Mr. Harrison knew it quite well, and the policeman would have told her it was an almost daily occurrence in those parts.

It was almost four o'clock in the afternoon of a bleak December day. Lilian was returning home. She had been kept in by the weather all the morning, and it had become intolerable. Her mother would sit in a semi-lethargic state gazing into the fire the greater part of the day, never uttering a word. No one knows how terribly trying it was to Lilian—so trying, that she almost fancied sometimes her brain would give way under it. She had persuaded herself the weather had improved, and had gone out. It was not snowing—very little snow fell that winter—but a cold drizzle was in the air and on the pavement. Very few people were in the streets. Suddenly Lilian came in the half-light on an object which at first seemed to have no definite shape. It looked more like a bundle of clothes than anything else. There could, however, be no manner of doubt that it contained animate life, for it was swaying to and fro. Lilian paused irresolutely. Her heart beat fast. Then she bent over the bundle. It was a woman clothed in tawdry rags, with her hair hanging uncared for and uncombed down her back, sitting on

the cold kerbstone. She was swaying herself to and fro. Lilian would have turned away, for the smell of drink penetrated through the drizzle, and pervaded the atmosphere, but she could not, for in the arms of the woman lay a little helpless child, moaning piteously with the cold. Lilian touched the woman on the shoulder, and after a few moments she looked up. Her face bore the traces of former beauty, which had become terribly coarsened and hardened; her mouth was large and distended, and bleeding from the force of a blow; her eye was cut, and her temple swollen, from another. The woman swayed herself violently to and fro. Lilian did not know what to do or say. At last she said, "My good woman, what are you doing here? Do go home. Let me help you up."

"It's all along o' my brutal 'usband," was the answer. "Oh! what a bad 'usband I have got! a brutal bad 'usband, and he struck me, 'e did, 'ere, and 'ere," and then she broke out into a bitter oath, which made Lilian shudder.

Luckily, a policeman came up at this moment, and assisted the woman to rise, said he knew where she lived, and would see her home, but "that they was all a bad lot." Lilian had had an experience of the great world which she never forgot. It dissipated the visions which her fancy had conjured up in the old days at Misterton of the great world of activity and work, and such visions once rudely dispelled are never likely to return.

So Christmas came and went. Just before its arrival Mrs. Beachwood had a thoroughly kind,

womanly, sympathizing letter from Lady Battersby, and another from Sir Lionel. The news had only just reached them of the death of their old friend. They were both most anxious to do all that lay in their power for the widow and orphan. Sir Lionel said how much he regretted not having been by the Rector's side to act a son's part when he died. Mrs. Beachwood received the letters, and read them in a flood of tears. She—as was, perhaps, a little natural, but very hard to bear—turned upon Lilian.

"Oh, Lily, how foolish you were! What would not Lionel Battersby have been to us both now? And what you could see to dislike in him I cannot imagine. Any other girl in the county would have jumped at the chance, and why my daughter should be so foolish! Certainly, it does seem very hard."

Lilian had got used to the querulous tone and words, so different to old times. She answered very gently,—

"I am sorry, mother, very sorry, for your sake. But it was not to be. I felt it was not then, and I feel it so still. I would do anything for your sake that I felt was right, but this I feel and know was wrong. I know you would not wish me to do anything that was against my conscience, mother."

Mrs. Beachwood would have answered an appeal like this very differently before her great trouble, but the events she had lately passed through had warped her judgment, and rendered her as opposite as any one could be to her old self. She answered now, sharply enough,—

"Conscience, child! I cannot see what conscience had got to do with it. In my young days we did

what our parents thought we ought to do ; where you get your high-flown notions from I cannot imagine. Not from me or your poor dear dead-and-gone father, I am sure," and Mrs. Beachwood burst into a hysterical flood of tears. Lilian knelt down by her side on the carpet, put her arms round her mother's neck, and kissed her repeatedly. When the flood of tears were over and her mother somewhat quieted, Lilian went off to her own room.

She often went there now. In spite of the cold, she would remain in it for hours. She was free then to think ; and no one came to interrupt her thoughts. Day by day she felt herself more and more alone. Her mother was either comatose or querulous. Lilian spoke to no one else except the servants and the tradespeople. They had no friends to come and see them. If they had, the situation seemed to require something more than friends. More and more the old want came over her ; the want one cannot help feeling that God intends every good woman to feel sometime in her life ; a head to think for her ; a heart to feel for her ; an arm to act for her. Lilian spoke half aloud to herself—" It seems so strange that he has never written even a line. Can he have forgotten us altogether ; or is he buried in his own trouble, or is he ill, or perhaps dead ?" The word struck like an icy touch to her very heart. " Dead, yes, perhaps this was the right solution. Otherwise, surely he would have written, or—or—perhaps even come." And yet through all this period of terrible trial to Lilian, she had a feeling deep down, hidden away, which she dared not encourage or shape into words, but which lived somewhere within, and she

knew it lived there, too—a feeling that some day Walter Beresford would come to her, for her.

And, night by night, as she bent in prayer, his name went up from her lips and from her very soul. She hoped it was not wrong. He had never asked her to love him, but she loved him with all her heart, and would love him to her life's end.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### MRS. WYNCOMBE PAYS A VISIT TO MAUD.

MAUD WYNCOMBE was not ill-qualified for the task she had undertaken. She was strong of nerve and brave of heart; her physical powers, her capacity for endurance, were those of a man rather than a woman. She slept only to awake at the slightest sound; her hand was ever ready to adjust pillows; the hour for strengthening food or medicine never came round without finding her at her post. But the tension was great. The task was a heavy one even for her—much heavier than she had expected; not that it would have made any difference or altered one iota her determination. Doctor Heathcote was charmed, and at the same time a little anxious. He would have liked to have obtained other assistance to share the duty, but Miss Wyncombe would not hear of it. He even went to the Rector, seeking to throw some of the responsibility upon him, but Mr. Wyncombe was rude to him—the first time in his life to any one—and said, "he washed his hands of the whole affair; that his daughter and he had parted; she was of age; that he had no further jurisdiction in the matter;" adding, with astounding warmth for him, "I only hope she will knock herself up; it will serve her right for disobeying my express

commands—express commands, mind you, sir!" Poor Mrs. Wyncombe led a very unhappy life at this time. Her husband, generally the most gentlemanly and considerate of men, had suddenly developed a talent for saying unpleasant things. His wife had not supported his authority. She never had, never would, and never did. It was all her fault. Daughters depended on their mothers for their characters; and this was what she had brought up Maud to be and do; namely, openly defy her father and disgrace her family before the world. Poor dear Mrs. Wyncombe responsible for her daughter's strength of character and fixity of purpose! A hen is just as responsible for her brood of ducks going into the water. Besides this, the servants did nothing right for their master. The cooking was abominable, and the waiting worse. Added to all this, Mrs. Wyncombe was deprived of her daughter's company, which she was particularly partial to; her daughter's assistance in managing the house, on which she considerably depended; and her daughter's decision for her of all disputed and doubtful points, which saved her a great deal of trouble, and satisfied both parties. Poor little woman, she bore it for a week; and then her opportunity came. Her husband had to attend a clerical meeting at a distance. He had gone out and had banged the door after him. One thing had particularly annoyed him to-day, although he did not confess it to his wife. It was nearly Christmas. The clothing club and blankets accounts for the parish had to be made up, and Maud always did this. This year, apparently, the Rector would have to do it himself.

The idea made him more angry than all the rest put together. The Rector had a great objection to accounts; and these were of the most intricate kind. People put in small sums weekly for a year, and then received interest, which sometimes required much calculation to adjust. A few hours would have sufficed his daughter Maud to set the whole thing straight; but the Rector knew that if he were to undertake the job the matter would extend over several days, and would probably not be over-correct when it was done. He did not care to ask any one out of doors. It would have seemed somewhat ignominious under the circumstances. His wife was quite hopeless. I have said that he went out and banged the door after him; and no wonder.

As soon as his back was turned Mrs. Wyncombe put on her bonnet and shawl, and, taking a basket of invalid luxuries under her arm, started off for Wyndham Terrace to see Maud. Poor little woman, it was with considerable trepidation that she lifted the latch of the little front garden gate. She was in considerable awe of her daughter; and she felt sure she was in her daughter's black books as well as her husband's.

However, Maud was very pleased to see her. She was very fond of her mother. She had felt the separation from both father and mother more than she cared to own. Besides, she was much too wise to offend both parents at once, even if it were possible, which it was not.

Mrs. Jones showed Mrs. Wyncombe into the sick room. Maud was sitting by the bed, apparently lost in thought, but holding one of the damp, clammy

hot hands of her patient in her own cool palm. She started when her mother entered, and half rose up, but did not let go of the hand, even when she kissed her mother. As for poor Mrs. Wyncombe, she took Maud's dark beautiful face into both her hands and kissed it, and shed tears over her as if they had been parted for years. Maud still held the hand in her own—his hand. "I think he likes to have it there, mother. He seems more restful when he feels my touch; and if I take it away his hand wanders over the counterpane as if he were searching for something he had lost." Maud spoke half-apologetically.

It was wonderful how soft she was there, in that sick room and by that form, to what she was to the outside world! Her words drew Mrs. Wyncombe's attention from her daughter to the young clergyman.

"Poor dear! poor dear!" came out of the very depth of Mrs. Wyncombe's motherly heart; "I never did see any one so much changed; how terribly sad it is! But you don't mean to say you keep your hand there always, child?"

"Yes, mother, pretty nearly. I have got used to sleeping like that now; and I don't like to feel he wants me, and I not by his side."

Did she ever ask herself, Is it Maud Wyncombe he wants and fancies by his side? If that sleep of forgetfulness were gone, would he clasp that hand as he does now? Nay, does he not even now, buried in the deep oblivion of unconsciousness, does he not picture some one else; some one with every right—yet no right—sitting by his side, and tending him, and never leaving him day or night? It is possible, if Maud could have penetrated into that dim cham-

ber in which the sick man's brain lay locked up, but still not absolutely immotionless, she would have flung that delicate hand from her, as if it had been molten lead, burning into fibre and bone and tissue as she held it.

The grey light of a December afternoon was silently filling the room, and Maud's face was hidden partly in the ever-deepening shadow; yet, even then, her mother recognized something in her daughter's face she had never seen before. Was it fatigue and unrest? Was it the ordinary sympathy of a nurse for a dying man? Or was it something so strong, so deep, so unchanging, that when once it comes into a human life nothing can ever wholly destroy, deface, and obliterate it;—no, not even cruelty, estrangement, separation; no, not death itself?

"Maddy, you love Walter Beresford?" It was half a question, half an exclamation.

"I do, mother. I have always loved him. I shall ever love him; nothing could ever make me cease to love him." Maud spoke vehemently, crimsoning the while. She felt the hot blood coursing through every vein in her body.

Mrs. Wyncombe wrung her hands.

"Oh! what will people say? What will they say?"

"They may say what they like. I would lay down my life, my good name, my honour at his feet." Maud Wyncombe had risen to her feet as she spoke. She had forgotten to whom she was speaking. Her imagination had conjured up the world her mother had spoken of, and it was to them she was uttering her defiance. In her agitation she had dropped

the hand she held before on the bed somewhat heavily. It seemed to disturb the sick man, for he groaned slightly. The groan recalled Maud to her patient. She felt she had wronged him in dropping his hand forgetfully in the way she had done. To her mother's horror, she bent over the bed and imprinted kiss after kiss upon his brow. What was the reason she had never yet ventured to kiss his lips? Something held her back; some force within her, so that she dared not do it.

Walter Beresford turned slightly away, as if the vehement kiss had pained him. The action, slight as it was, struck icy cold into two hearts. It seemed ominous of the future.

It took some time before the Rector's wife was sufficiently soothed down to be able to talk anything like rationally. Then she asked a very natural question:

"But has no one communicated with his friends? Have not you written, or Mr. Heathcote, or even good Mrs. Jones?"

"There is no one to write to. His sister is very ill. And his so-called friends seem all to have forgotten him."

Maud was lying. Had she not that very morning locked up a packet of unopened letters in the corner cupboard, and some of them bearing the Bickley postmark! It would be idle to say she did not know where they came from.

The answer, however, satisfied her mother. After a time Mrs. Wyncombe rose to go, not a whit comforted by her visit. She made one effort to

induce her daughter to go with her before her departure.

"Maddy, dear, do come home with me and let Mrs. Jones have another nurse. You are knocking yourself up. And your father and I do miss you so. I know he does, although he would not confess it for the world; and so cross as he has become of late, too. I should not be surprised if, after a while, he would not have you back at all, if you don't come soon. And surely you have a duty to us, especially to me, Maddy dear."

The good little woman might as well have been addressing the winds.

"No, mother; I am very sorry. I have a duty here. Nothing but death will part me from Walter Beresford as long as he wants me by his side."

Little Mrs. Wyncombe returned to the Rectory with a heart even heavier than that with which she had come out.

When she had gone Maud knelt down by the bed.

"Yes, I have confessed it now. Never mind, it makes no difference. It was all yours before. It cannot be more so for being told." But the sick man lay perfectly motionless, and answered never a word.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### AWAKENING.

THUS the weeks flew by, with little or no change in the sufferer, or in the situation. The task of nurse was an arduous one for Maud Wyncombe, even with Mrs. Jones to fall back upon, and to do the more manual part of the work. To perform such duties well and efficiently requires the nerves to be in a constant state of tension; both body and mind have to be always on the alert. To say that Maud Wyncombe nursed Walter Beresford efficiently is to put it as mildly as possible. She was all that a nurse could be, forestalling every unexpressed wish; interpreting every feeble sign; and there can be little doubt that had Walter Beresford had inferior nursing, in all human probability he must have died. The struggle between life and death went on, with apparently little or no change, from one week's end to another, and still the patient showed no signs of awaking to consciousness.

Maud watched him with a fierce sense of possession. She knew eager friends would have rushed to his side in a moment had they known he was there; and there in such a condition. But she had taken care they should know nothing about it. For all any one had told them he might be still on the con-

tinent, or dead on a foreign strand. She knew, too, that he was loved; but the girl who loved him was far away, and, pale-faced thing, etiquette would keep her away, even if she knew it all. Etiquette, indeed! it would never keep Maud Wyncombe from the man she loved! What was love without sacrifice? Why, for her love, she was ready to sacrifice anything; lay it all at his feet if only he would take it. "Yes," she thought, as she watched him, "if he dies he will die in my arms; and I will write and give my friend Lilian Beachwood a full, true, and particular account of his last moments, in which every word shall have its sting; and if he lives—why then he will be bound in honour, in common gratitude, to live for me; and I will teach him to love me—even if he loves me not when he marries me—by all the arts woman can master, living with the man she loves, and whom she means to make love her. And then we will invite Lilian to come and stay with us, and see our happiness; and she will find out what I know already, that it takes something more than a pale face and a soft look to make a man like Walter Beresford happy."

Many such thoughts as these coursed through Maud Wyncombe's busy brain during the long time of waiting.

And then she would go on to build castles in the air—castles of love, of ambition, of future bliss—in which revenge that any one should have come near and worshipped her idol had no part. And so her love daily fed itself until it grew in passion more and more; and then she would bend over that prostrate form and kiss his forehead and his hair; or

she would kneel down and kiss his long thin fingers, and sometimes cover them with tears, but she never kissed his lips. And so Christmas came—how unlike all other Christmases in her life!—and then the new year dawned. What fate did it hold in its grasp, as the bells rang out into the silent midnight sky, with its robe of impenetrable blackness! What fate did it hold in its hand for those two young lives, separated by miles of space, but at one in that one thing—that one master-passion—in that one all-governing, all-devouring, all-subduing influence!

So week followed week; and as January drew to a close, Doctor Heathcote's face began to brighten. The body was getting stronger, and with the bodily strength there was every hope—a first-rate physician said from the neighbouring midland capital—that the mind would gather strength too.

Doctor Heathcote warned Maud Wyncombe that the young clergyman might wake to consciousness at any moment. She received the news apparently, and to all outward seeming, calmly enough, but her heart beat fast. He would find her there. Would he know whose hand it was, that he must have felt even when he did not recognize it, attending to his wants all through that weary time? Would he tell her to go, or would he bid her stay—stay by him for ever? She neither ate, drank, nor slept; her whole life was concentrated in that weary, absorbing watch for the first tremble of life—mental life—but still the days passed by and no change came.

And when the change did come it found her almost doubting whether it would ever come at all.

It was late afternoon, Walter Beresford had been sleeping all day a more natural slumber than he had ever seemed to have before. Maud Wyncombe had had a visit from her mother, clandestinely paid; and the latter was now gone—gone in a great state of trepidation for fear her lord and master should have found out where she had been.

Suddenly a voice came from the bed, weak but clear, and going straight to the heart of that solitary listener.

"I am very tired! Mother, is that you?" And then the truth came back to him that she was gone from his side for ever; and he put up his thin hands, that he could hardly lift from his couch, and burst into tears.

Maud Wyncombe busied herself in getting him a cup of tea, putting by the doctor's orders a teaspoonful of brandy in it. Walter received it, but without seeming to know who brought it, and in a few moments he was asleep again. She sent for Doctor Heathcote. The good doctor rubbed his hands, and then his chin. "Ah, that is very good news, the best of news! Now we shall mend perceptibly every day. It has only wanted mind to assist matter; and now that we have aroused that, we may safely leave them to settle matters between themselves, only throwing in a little assistance now and then. Well, my dear Miss Wyncombe, I must confess it is largely due to the very best of nursing. I only hope the young man will be grateful. He owes a good deal more to you than he does to me; and, perhaps, he would rather pay you than me after all." The good doctor laughed. He had thought all along that the whole thing was ar-

ranged between them; and now, no doubt, all things would move along merrily. Maud blushed crimson, and turned the conversation, which was getting unpleasantly warm, by asking for further instructions.

"What was she to give him when he awoke?" The doctor gave his orders, and then rose to go. His last words were:

"Mind, Miss Wyncombe, absolute quiet for a few days, at any rate, and no talking."

Maud felt as if a whole world of time were compressed into the hour or two of silent waiting which intervened before that still stretched out form on the bed—which was all her life—showed signs of returning mental animation.

The shadows deepened into dusk, silently—as if they, too, respected the quiet of that sick room. Outside were to be heard the tinkling bells of the muffin man, and now and again the steps of passers-by on the pavement. Wyndham Terrace looked out on a side street, and had no entrance or exit for carts at one end. The steps on the pavement were chiefly those of workmen, hastening home from their work, or boys laden with late purchased goods or provisions. It seemed an age to Maud since she had mingled with that outside life, since she threaded her way through those streets, and passed to and fro on that pavement—an age of thought, if not of action, of feeling and sentiment, though not of time. She felt very far away from them all now, that for the first time in those busy weeks she had leisure to think of them at all. As the hour when he must awaken drew on the excitement intensified itself, until Maud could hardly sit down. Her all was

staked, and the last die would soon have to be cast. Perhaps much might depend on her conduct, on her words. If only she knew what he would say and do she might form some plans. She might have prayed, but she was too fierce to pray—fierce to think how she would triumph if she won. How she would bear herself to those who would have snatched him from her, now that he was hers—hers—hers—all her own; fierce, too, to think how she would cast herself—if he would have her—at his feet, body, soul, and spirit! Yes, she felt she would sell her very soul to be locked in his arms, to have his warm loving breath on her cheek, his kisses on her lips—her lips that had never yet dared to touch his, even when he slept—he one with her! She would like to have walked the room, to and fro, like an angry lioness in her den, only she dared not lest she should wake him, and that would bring the dread moment of certainty nearer—the moment she longed for, yet dared not hasten.

And so the shadows deepened—deepened into night. Was it ominous for all time—ominous of dead and buried hopes, of a fierce spirit not subdued, but defeated and quelled—of a life flickering out alone, dark, silent, with no light of moon or star breaking through the dimness? Maud shuddered; it shook her from head to foot. On a bracket at the farther end of the room was a candlestick, and in the candlestick a candle. Maud stood up; her limbs were almost asleep. She silently moved across the room, and then lighted the candle with a spill ignited at the fire. She put some coals on the dying embers as silently as possible, and then returned to her watching-place in the window seat. Not a soul passed now; an angry

cloud had gathered. Rain was falling outside in big melancholy drops. Maud could hear it, but could not see it. An hour passed away; and then quietly Walter Beresford awoke. He awoke with the sense of some one being in the room. His face was turned to the wall; had it been otherwise he could not have distinguished that shapely form by the window. Some one was in the room. He had a recollection of some one—some dim indistinct some one who had been near him, in the shadow land through which he had passed—giving him iced drinks when he wanted them; smoothing his pillow when he turned restlessly on his bed, ever by his side and yet not recognizable in the mist that hung over his brain, and dimmed his sight. Was that the same some one whom he felt was in the room now? It was not his mother? Could it be—could it be Lilian? And gradually, as the thought forced itself upon him, it gathered into such strength and intensity that he seemed to lose command over his external senses, until there came from between his almost set teeth, in an agony of intensity, not loud but deep, thrilling, penetrating to every corner of that little chamber, just that one word, twice repeated, "Lilian! Lilian!" It penetrated to every chink and crevice of the room, and it went straight to the heart of that one solitary watcher. Her hour was come; and it was not she who was near his thoughts after all.

Maud rose up, and went and flung herself down by the bed. She took the hand that was lying there and kissed it again, and again, and again. "It is not Lilian. She has left you here to die. No, it is

I, Maud—Maud Wyncombe—who have nursed you, unaided and alone, through these long weary weeks; who have stood between you and death, and have prevented death taking you when he would have done it, but for me—I, who love you; who have seemed to love you and you only all my life long, who loved you long before you saw that pale-faced child whose name has just passed your lips—I, who have given up woman's best and dearest birthright, my honour and my good name, to come here and stand by your bedside, and do as no other living soul could or would do for you!" The words burst in fierce torrents through Maud Wyncombe's white set lips.

Walter Beresford almost sat upright in bed, starting as if he had been stung; but he was weak as a new-born child, and he fell back again on to his pillows with a groan.

Not a word passed from his white lips. Could Maud have seen the terrible whiteness of his face, and the wildness in the large clear brilliancy of his eyes, it would have warned her to be quiet, but she saw nothing, she only felt his hand. Darkness shrouded, embraced, mantled them both. There was a moment or two of almost death-like silence. Only the ticking of the clock in the hall, and the splashing of the rain-drops outside, broke the stillness.

Then Maud Wyncombe began again, less passionately, but with a distinctness of utterance, a set determination of purpose, which betrayed even more than the passion which had gone before the fire which burnt within.

"You called for Lilian. Is it Lilian Beachwood

you mean? Did I not tell you how, before you went to Misterton, she had loved—if such natures as hers can love—loved Sir Lionel Battersby, and then it was you, and then hardly had your back been turned before it was Raymond Winslow? And now she has married him—married him before your mother was cold in the grave! It was only yesterday that I found they had had the effrontery to send you cards and wedding-cake, and I placed them in their proper place—in the fire! And now she is lying in his arms and on his breast, if he has not tired of her, or, as is more probable, she of him."

There had been a sound of wheels outside, and a ring at the bell, just after Maud had begun to speak for the first time; but Maud Wyncombe had heard nothing, had heeded nothing. It was her opportunity. She was carried away by the intensity of her emotion. She had forgotten everything in the eager pleading—in the bitter blinding of her flood of passion. As she commenced to speak the second time the door had opened silently, and two figures were standing in the shadows in the farther corner of the room. They were stopped by the deep reverberating, cutting accents of her voice. She did not hear them. It is doubtful if it would have stopped the eager flow of her words had she done so. They could not see her, nor she them. And yet in those few moments she, kneeling there by that bedside, had lied about both. Was it accident, was it fate, was it retributive justice, that those two men standing by the half-closed door were Lionel Battersby and Raymond Winslow?

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A QUARTETTE.

WE fared rather badly that winter at Misterton. No one had as yet been appointed to the Rectory in the place of Mr. Beachwood; or, if any one had been, the notification had not reached either the churchwardens or the parishioners, or appeared in the newspapers. The appointment rested with Sir Lionel Battersby—as has been mentioned before in these pages—and he had as yet shown no signs of returning to the Grange. His agent, when questioned on the subject, said he believed his master would shortly return to England, but that it was probable Sir Lionel and Lady Battersby would spend the winter and early spring either in London or in the neighbourhood of Scarborough, where Sir Lionel had a small estate and another house, the tenancy of which had just lapsed. Meantime, my father complained bitterly of the way in which the services were conducted at Misterton. Strangers filled reading-desk and pulpit every Sunday; and at any rate, in his judgment, anything but to their own credit or the enjoyment, much less the advantage and edification, of their hearers. It mattered little to me as far as the church services were concerned. I never went out much in the winter, and this winter I

seemed worse than ever. I think I had worried a good deal about things having all gone wrong, and the trouble which had come on those I loved; and this, perhaps, had affected me more than I knew.

I, too, felt the absence of a kind and sympathizing clergyman at the Rectory, but in a different way. I had always been accustomed to being looked after by the clergy. They had pitied me in my weakness and loneliness, and so they came to see me; and then gradually—I hope it is not vanity to say so—I think they learned to like me, and so came a little for the pleasure of the thing. Often for weeks together, when we lived by the great lake side, the vicar and curate were my only visitors; in fact, my only society besides my father. I, too, should be very glad when some one nice came to the Rectory.

Often and often my father went over to Atherstone, a village four miles away, where he liked the church, the clergy, and the services, rather than place himself in the tender mercies of the Philistines —as he called them—at Misterton.

We often talked together in the winter evenings of Walter Beresford, of his long silence, and wondered where he could be, and what he could be doing. We had seen the appointment of another curate to Atterley Edge, otherwise my father would have gone there to seek him. Besides, if he were there, or even if his old landlady there knew of his whereabouts, why had no answer come to our letters—not even a line of acknowledgment? I had written again and again until I had given it up as labour in vain.

You cannot imagine how lonely I am sometimes. People who can get about, and have the free use of

their limbs, have no notion what it is to be pent up all day in the house almost in one position ; and I do get so tired of reading. Then I am afraid I get a little fretful and querulous. I don't think I ever missed Walter Beresford more than I did that winter. He is always so tender, so patient with me ; and I think I value it all the more that it is all so contrary to his nature. He is so quick to others ; he is all quiet carefulness to me. How I wished he could come and live somewhere near me, to see him constantly, and then I would do him good too. I flattered myself I always did do him good, and now I thought I could tell him something he would give all his life to know.

I think this last thought had been more on my mind one long January day than it had ever been before. Poor Walter seemed so sadly to need a harbour of refuge, and I thought I had found him one ; one ready to receive him, one which I felt even I, who was as jealous over him as any woman, could trust him in with all my heart. I felt inclined to call his name aloud, as if that would bring him, now that all other means had apparently failed.

My father had left me in the early morning, quite early, before I had thought of getting up ; Harris had gone to the station to meet him. I was expecting to hear wheels on the gravel every moment. At last it came, at first distant, then quickly nearer. How dearly I should have liked to go out and meet him—the dear father ! but there I was chained, tied by the leg, as it were, to that sofa, and quite unable to get up.

A ring! Is old Elizabeth never going to open the

door? Yes, at last it is open. Surely those are voices, and more steps than one. Who can father have got with him? not strangers, I hope. I hate strangers. It was one of my cross days, you see. Stay! a wild thought flashes through my mind. Is it—can it possibly be Walter Beresford? No, it is too good news to be true. But what a time they are taking to get their coats off! Why does not father come straight in at first, as usual, and kiss me? If they only knew—and surely he ought to know—how impatient I am. The door opens, and my father's massive, grey-fringed face and spare, upright form appears alone, framed in the doorway.

"My boy, I have picked up an old friend and a new one. They were coming here to see you."

"Me, father?" in a tone of great surprise and questioning.

"So Elizabeth," continued my father, "must contrive them dry sheets and bedroom for the night."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when in came the two guests. "Why, it is the 'Ray'—Raymond Winslow." He almost takes me up in his arms.

I was so pleased to see him. Not Walter Beresford, but the next best thing to it. I had hardly time to notice the stranger that followed behind him, except that he was older and shorter than the Ray himself. I was quite taken up with the unexpected pleasure of the meeting. My father watched us with evident pleasure. I have said he loved Raymond Winslow, and was as proud of him as if he were son of his own.

Then he turns to the stranger, "You must forgive

my son's rudeness, sir. You see he and Raymond here are more like brothers than anything else."

Then turning to me, "Morrice, you have heard the name of our new friend before, Sir Lionel Battersby."

"Yes, often and often." Then I stretched out my hand. I noticed the deep black; and I liked the look of truth—honest, open truth—in the face, and I felt here was one I could like and respect.

I think he liked me too—perhaps he pitied me—poor weak mortal! out of his strong, manly frame. He took my hand in both his. "I know two of your friends who are never tired of sounding your praises; so I seem to know you, although we have never met before—the Rev. Walter Beresford, who became my friend in the summer—a friend I can never value at too high a rate; and Mr. Raymond Winslow here, a friend of only a few hours' standing." It turned out afterwards that these two had met on the Calais boat—had crossed together. A little conversation, accidentally begun, had shown first that they knew the same places, and then the same people. They had not crossed the water before they found they were both on the same errand. They had both written again and again to Walter Beresford. Neither had received any answer. By a singular coincidence both had started to look after their mutual friend on the same day. Sir Lionel was on his way to the only address he knew of—that at Atterley Edge. Raymond Winslow was coming to us, thinking it most likely that I should be supplied with the latest intelligence. He had with some difficulty persuaded

the baronet to accompany him to Bickley. I believe the latter would have gone to no other house in the village; but the very fact that he had never crossed the threshold of the cottage, through the quarrel with Captain Lloyd Beresford, had prevented any associations connecting themselves with the place. At the station they met my father returning home, and so got a lift up to the house.

That night we sat up talking very late. Both were very much struck and disappointed that I knew no more than they did. Sir Lionel explained to us the reason of his intense surprise at receiving no reply to his letters. On the news of the death of poor Mr. Beachwood he had immediately determined that the one clergyman that he would select out of the large clerical circle of his acquaintance would be — Walter Beresford. He might be conferring a favour on the latter; he felt and said he was conferring a much greater boon on Misterton. After allowing some time to elapse—out of respect to the memory of his old friend—he had written to the young clergyman to make the offer. That letter—a letter any one would acknowledge as of the first importance, whether the offer was accepted or rejected—had never received any reply. After a time he wrote again, imagining the first must have gone wrong in the post, but that met with the same fate. A third also miscarried, and then he became really anxious lest his friend—for whom he felt the greatest sympathy and liking—was either ill or dead. It was this which had brought him to England.

"I tell you what," said Raymond Winslow, "I think this is a very bad business. It is my firm belief poor Walter has come to grief"—he was trying to speak lightly, but his voice was thick—"somewhere on the Continent; I don't believe he ever came home at all."

"Neither do I," responded my father.

"You will find him, Ray," I pleaded eagerly. Oh, what would I not have given for a man's strength at this moment! To think Walter Beresford was in need, and I not able to help him.

"Ay, that will I, if he is to be found."

The baronet stretched out his hand. "And I will go with you. I think, however, we had better see if any one has heard of him at Atterley Edge, first of all."

"Yes," said Raymond, "we will go there first, and then we will search every nook in Europe; and if he be living"—his voice shook with emotion—"we will bring him home; and if he be dead" . . . . . Raymond got up from his chair, threw his pipe into the fire, and then stirred the embers with his foot.

"Come now, gentlemen, I think it is time we all went to bed." My father felt it was time a move was made, and he alone had the strength of will to make it. I think he was the only one of the four who slept a wink that January night.

Sir Lionel could not well come into the neighbourhood without seeing his agent, who occupied a pretty little gabled house in the village of Bickley, not many yards from our cottage. He sent a message over to him the first thing in the morning,

but the interview caused a slight delay in starting. It was, therefore, late evening when they arrived at their destination at Atterley Edge. Rain was falling fast. The two friends first drove to the only respectable hotel in the place to secure rooms and leave luggage, and then proceeded to Wyndham Terrace.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### ANOTHER.

THERE was a dead silence in the small chamber when Maud Wyncombe finished speaking, but only for a moment. Sir Lionel seemed utterly astonished, and stood as if struck by the doorway. He had been the first to enter the room. Not so Raymond Winslow. He muttered between his teeth, "Lying, by Jove! Just in time, it seems. Some deep villany here. I think I know the young woman's voice, although I have not heard it so very many times before."

Then he walked straight up to the candlestick, took it from its place on the bracket, and advanced towards the bed. Not a sound had come from Walter Beresford all through Maud Wyncombe's impassioned pleading, and still more impassioned recital! Had the nurse forgotten the Doctor's strict injunctions, "Absolute quiet for a few days, and no talking?" Raymond Winslow advanced, candle in hand, towards the bed. It would be impossible to describe the feelings which chased each other through his mind. Anger on behalf of his own good name and for his friend; anger on behalf of the fair girl who had been traduced—a girl whom, in common with all who knew her, he had learnt to respect, but for

whom a thought of love—as, in fact, for no one else in the wide world—had never crossed his mind; anger that her name should have been thus lightly linked with his. But deeper than all this was a feeling of disgust that the base trick should have emanated from a woman—the base slander have stained a woman's lips—the base falsehood have been uttered by a woman's tongue! He was no ladies' man—that fair, stalwart, bronzed young Englishman—but his mother, long since dead, was an Englishwoman, and he respected the whole race for her, if he could not find in his heart to love any one of them. Oh, woman! when you descend to meanness, to slander, to the petty trickeries and covert innuendoes of drawing-room life, why do you not remember your patent, your birthright of nobility? You never know the impression you leave on the men of your circle—the men who, perhaps, laugh at your jibes and encourage your sneers, but who, through you, learn to look upon womankind as something much lower, more spiteful, more cruel than they ever thought it before. There is much talk now-a-days about the rights of woman. If it be a right to pen books which no man can read without a blush—a right to speak words at sewing meetings, and in company with their fellow-women, which no gentleman would speak to his friend—a right to blast by innuendo, if not open slander, the fair reputations of those better, and nobler, and purer, and more healthy-minded than themselves, then is this the age of woman's rights; and surely do they exercise them to the full.

We may thank God daily for the influence in our lives of a good woman; and we may pray God daily

to keep out of our existence, as a tainted thing, the feeblest breathings, the most remote presence of a bad one.

Maud Wyncombe heard a step. She thought it must be Mrs. Jones. She was beginning to be afraid of the silence which her words had produced on Walter Beresford. She could not hear him breathe. Was he indeed breathing at all? She turned with the intention of rising, supporting her hands by the bed. It was not Mrs. Jones's step. Some man; who could it be? Most girls would have been afraid of robbery, if not something worse; but Maud Wyncombe did not know what physical fear was. It was enough to have startled the strongest nerve. The stranger held the candle at arm's length towards her, so that the light (such as it was) fell full on the girl's face. Maud could only distinguish a tall form, and strongly built, standing behind the candle. She could not tell in the least who it was, or whether she had ever seen it before.

"Shall I assist you to rise, young lady?"

"Thank you, I require no assistance," and Maud rose to her feet, and drew herself up to her full height. "I should like to know who you are, thrusting yourself in here uninvited! Do you happen to know that this is a sick room; that the sick man is lying on that bed, and must not be disturbed; and that I, his nurse, forbid you to advance another step, and order you to quit this room instantly?" Maud had come to the conclusion this was some common footpad, who would be easily frightened by her determination.

"Oh, his nurse; that is all, is it? Thank good-

ness, you are not his wife yet, at any rate." Maud started.

The voice and words were those of a gentleman at any rate; and had she not heard tones something like them somewhere before? Was it some friend of Walter Beresford's come at the very nick of time, to ruin all her plans and spoil her chance of success, just when the moment upon which so much depended had come? The stranger took no notice of her words, but strode past her as if she had not been in the room, and went to the bedside, close to the head. Then she became conscious that he was not alone, but that there was another with him. Sir Lionel advanced to his side, but knocked over a small stool on his way with his knees, which of course he could not see. The silence frightened Maud Wyncombe more than all that had gone before. It seemed so terrible, there in the darkness, seeing nothing distinctly, even where the light was, and all the rest of the room buried in the profoundest shadow, and with these two men, who were behaving so strangely, and yet who felt so evidently that they had a right to be there in that room, and by that bed—a better right than she had. Raymond Winslow cast the light full on the face resting on the pillow. The dark eyes were closed, but under them were the blackest of circles. The dark hair hung matted, heavy, uncut, uncombed, over the forehead—that square, finely-cut forehead, which generally indicated so much power and intelligence of thought within. The face was ashy white; the lips a little open, but no breath apparently issuing from them; a stubbly, week's old beard

almost hid them, and covered the lower part of the face. Nevertheless, it was Walter Beresford, and no other. Raymond Winslow was moved as he had never been moved before. To think that he had been wandering away, anywhere and everywhere on the Continent, when his friend—whom he loved with the love of Jonathan for David—when his friend was in such dire need as this, and now apparently, and to all outward seeming, he was dead—killed by this passionate woman with a foul lie! He turned on one side for a moment and brushed away a burning tear; then he moved aside, and held the light so that his friend could see the form on the bed. Then he spoke to Maud Wyncombe.

"Did you say you were his nurse? Walter Beresford's nurse? I tell you, you have killed him; killed him with a foul lie I was just in time to hear!" Raymond Winslow was terrible in his anger—one of those men hard to rouse, but like a lion when roused, hard to tame. "I think you may go now. You must be satisfied. Your work is done. You have killed the noblest man that ever stepped on the face of God's earth. Surely you are satisfied, and may leave us to our friend in peace." And then Raymond clenched his fists and hissed through his set teeth and white quivering lips, "Would that you were a man, that I might strike you!"

But Maud only understood one sentence. It went into her brain. It seemed to madden her. Could it be true? She had killed him—killed him, for whom she would have laid down life itself; killed him who was indeed life itself to her! She flung herself down by the bed again in an agony of terror,

and remorse, and grief. "Oh! it cannot be true; it cannot be true!" And she would have seized his hand again that was still lying cold and lifeless by his side; but Raymond Winslow stretched out his hand and held her back.

"Your touch brings defilement. You shall not desecrate his hand. I tell you, you are not wanted here!"

"And who are you?" Maud flashed up, "that dares to speak to me like that?" His words had roused her, now that she understood for the first time their full import. Raymond did not answer, except by holding the candle so that its flickering, but still sufficient light fell full on his face.

Maud covered her face with her hands. She knew him well enough. It was Raymond Winslow. His name came unconsciously from between her lips.

"Yes; I see you know me. I am Raymond Winslow, and this is Lionel Battersby." Nothing more was said. No more was needed. It was the hand of retributive justice, and Maud knew it to be such. One hand she kept over her eyes, with the other she groped along the wall for the door. Lionel Battersby opened it for her, and she passed out. The hall was dark, but still her hand was over her eyes. Outside the rain was descending in torrents, falling in splashes from the roof, and issuing in floods from the gutters, and pouring down the spouts. Lionel Battersby closed the door of the sick room after her. Both men were thinking too much of their friend to pay heed to her. Was he dead or alive? was all in their thoughts. Maud groped for the latch, and opened it and passed

out into the night. She had nothing on her head; no shawl on her shoulders. She did not know where she was going or what she was doing; but somehow she followed the old familiar road until she came to the old familiar door at the Rectory.

Mechanically she pulled the bell. It was twelve o'clock. All the household was in bed and asleep. It was some time before any one answered. Then a light moved several times across the window. Some one within was putting on some articles of clothing. Then the window above the door—it was that of Mr. and Mrs. Wyncombe's bedroom—opened, and the Rector stretched out his head.

"Who is there? Do you know what time of night it is, to rouse up decent people from their beds?"

Maud raised herself to answer. "It is I, father." The words were spoken wearily. He could see nothing, and he had not heard—had not caught—the answer.

"Who?"

"I, father—Maud Wyncombe."

The response came sharp through the night air: "There is no home for you here. You may go back from whence you came; you are no daughter of mine." And the old man shut to the window. Poor Mrs. Wyncombe lay in her bed shivering and trembling, and dare say never a word.

Hard by St. Swithin's Hospital there is an Anglican Sisterhood. It is some five miles from Atterley. In the morning after that night the dog bayed so incessantly that the porter went to open the door.

And there, lying on the step, senseless with the fever in her bones and in her mind, was a young girl. And when the weeks passed by, and the patient rose up from her bed of sickness, it was no longer Maud Wyncombe who nursed the sick and tended the helpless in St. Swithin's Hospital, but one far more tender, more considerate, more helpful in good, more resolute against evil—one Sister Frances!

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE BREAKING OF THE SHADOWS.

WHEN Walter Beresford awoke up from that sleep, or rather swoon of exhausted nature, a week had passed, and he was miles away from Atterley Edge, never to return. It was the one point Raymond Winslow insisted on, when the doctors said it was a relapse, and there was some prospect of a lengthened return to the comatose state in which the young clergyman had lain already so many long weary weeks—namely, that they must get him away.

"No," he argued to the doctors and Sir Lionel—more to the former than to the latter, for they needed more convincing—"I am sure there is more danger in remaining than there is in going. We must, at all hazards, get Walter away from memories and miseries; from associations which, in such a dark room, must be dark; and, above all, from that abominable Mrs. Jones, who, I am sure, must have come very near murdering him many a time if she has been in the habit of sending him up for years such abominable stuff under the guise of soup as she ventured to serve up to us to-day. And he used to know what a good dinner was at Cambridge. Faugh! Sir Lionel, you

look as if you had not got over it yet; you had more than I had."

"Yes, and I am older than you. You will find things take more effect on your constitution when you get to my age."

The fact was they were both inclined to be merry, now that Doctor Heathcote gave them—notwithstanding the relapse—every hope of his patient. They did not tell him all that had passed with regard to Maud Wyncombe, and he was a trifle surprised that they were not sufficiently grateful to her for all her careful tending and nursing.

So determination carried the day, and Walter Beresford was removed to Sir Lionel's other residence near Scarborough. Lady Battersby was there, and herself superintended the getting ready of the best and the most cheerful room in the house for him.

Walter Beresford awoke as from a hideous dream; but the removal acted like a charm. It seemed to help him to forget—even if he had heard—all that had passed. The air braced him. The looking forward to his new duties at Misterton gave an impetus to his mind, and so helped on the strengthening of the body, much and deeply as he regretted the cause of the step in life which had come to him. He was soon able to be wheeled into the drawing-room by his two loving nurses, Sir Lionel and Raymond Winslow, and no one could welcome him more heartily than did Lady Battersby. He had quite won, in what seemed those far-away days in Switzerland, her warm motherly heart. And did no other thoughts crowd into his mind

during this patient time of waiting for bodily strength;—in the early morning, when the fresh Spring sun peeped in at his window; in the afternoon, when he slept and when he woke; and in the dreamy evening time, before the lights were brought in, while the firelight flickered and blazed up, and died away again, and seemed to be playing hide-and-seek amongst the coals? Yes, his thoughts went back much to the year which had passed—the year that had been so full, so momentous in his life; and in the very middle of the year, like the fairy in a transformation scene, stood Lilian Beachwood. Surely she was fair enough to take her place of right in any man's vision,—fair of form, fair of face, fairer still in the pure beauty, in the rare sweetness, in the noble lovableness of her nature. And yet fair as was his vision of her—a vision of a bygone time—she was fairer now, could he have seen her, as the swift, fleeting months that had come and gone had left her. Fairer of shape; for her form had rounded and become more womanly; fairer of face, for the lights were more shaded; a look of thought was on her face which had perhaps been lacking before; fairer of mind, of character, of life, as silver is refined which has passed through the fire. No human life is complete which has not known grief, which has not passed through sorrow. It is like a summer's day without its shade. It is a lesson which sometimes it takes us years to learn, but which God teaches to every man and woman in the world who is willing to learn it—the lesson of the place that grief takes, that sorrow fills, in the wondrous economy of human

life. Never had Lilian's character shown itself in its true nobility as it did now. Misfortune, disappointment, almost the loss of hope itself; her mother's querulousness, separation from friends, from old associations, everything seemed to have followed the death of her father, and to have come upon her young life in quick succession, if not at once. These things had not done her any harm; they had not soured her temper or made her discontented. No; she had met them all as few women could meet them if they would, or would meet them if they could; not without the shedding of many tears; not without much doubt and hesitation; not without now and again being downcast and desponding; but beneath all this, with the calm assurance of faith deep down in her being, and with a gentleness to her mother and those around her which nothing ever lessened or impaired. No; they had done her good; they had taught her experience; they had deepened her knowledge, and widened her view of life. She was a woman, brave and true, and pure, and good, such as a good man may take into his life and find true helpmeet all his life long.

It was a pleasant enough life at Chumleigh—the house which had opened its hospitable doors to the invalid—in those days of growing convalescence. They were days of much peace within and without. Peace without, inasmuch as all the little party were bright and joyous with hope, pleased to see Walter Beresford's steady progress, and happy in each other's society. Peace without, in the absence of all jarring notes, in the presence of union, and content, and love.

Peace within, in the full assurance that the Hand which had guided, and sustained, and supported through sorrow could lead up to and bring into the bright light of joy, through storm to calm, through breakers to the haven, through unrest and doubt, and disquiet and fear, to rest and quiet and peace. And so February left them, and then March came. Winter was past, Spring was come, and the time drew nigh when Walter could with safety take the journey to his new home at Misterton. He was able now to drive in the warm afternoons, to walk with Lady Battersby in her garden, to mingle in and enjoy the society of the neighbourhood.

Before the time of departure came it happened that he and his host were left alone one evening in the study of Chumleigh. Lady Battersby and Raymond Winslow were playing backgammon in the drawing-room. Sir Lionel seemed, for him, strangely restless. He moved about the room, shifted books unnecessarily, stirred the fire, and then he came and stood by the young clergyman's chair. There was only the light of the fire to lighten the room. Neither could see each other's face. At last the baronet spoke. His voice was a little thick, but otherwise he seemed calm and composed enough.

"Walter"—he always addressed the clergyman by his Christian name now—"there is something I want to say to you—something I have been wanting to tell you for a long time; but I have waited, because the doctors ordered you quiet, above all things—quiet of mind more than of body." He paused for a moment; the words had been spoken very slowly, but distinctly. The young clergyman made no reply, but his heart

beat fast. He had been content to leave the explanation of the old silence at Thun, the statements of Maud Wyncombe, and Lilian's own apparent con sciousness, for time to clear up. He had felt of late how deep was the trust he could place in her; and had she not shown signs of a deeper feeling for him than friendship warranted—unintentional signs, but all the more real and convincing for that? He knew the time would come when all this would be cleared up. Was it coming? Nay, had it come? Sir Lionel went on:

"We have never referred, either Raymond Winslow or I, to the time when we found you at Atterley. We wished those memories to sleep. Forgive me if I must needs waken them for a moment. I cannot tell how much you may have heard of the poison which was poured into your ear, which we, I firmly believe, by the grace and providence of God, were brought there to hear." Sir Lionel spoke reverently. Walter Beresford stretched out his hand and grasped his friend's. It was his only reply.

The baronet went on:

"Not only you must have noticed that I was silent, you must have thought me strangely silent, during those long days in Switzerland—silent, I mean, about home and—and—Misterton." The words came with a gulp.

"Yes, Lion, I did notice it, and wonder at it a little; but I knew you were as true as steel. I never doubted that."

"Walter, you know why I speak to you now. I have penetrated your secret, partly by observing you, partly by what your friend has told me." Big beads

of perspiration stood on Sir Lionel's brow. "It is useless for me to put it in so many words, but I think it right to tell you—you have a right to know my part in this matter. It can be told in very few words. It is the history of many a better life than mine. It will be, doubtless, of many another. I saw a flower. I would have plucked it and gathered it to my bosom." There was a long pause—a dead silence. . . . Sir Lionel walked to the window. It was all darkness outside, but had the landscape lain before him it is a question how much he would have seen of it. . . . Then he came back and went on, but more quickly: "I cannot tell you how sweet, and true, and womanly she was—you do not need to be told—but it was not to be." Sir Lionel brushed away a tear with his sleeve. "I have said it has been the lot of better and worthier lives than mine. I know it is God's will; and you have shown me—although you do not know it—that that must be best. May God bless you, Walter, in your life, in your work, in your duty; bless you to your poor people and mine; ay, and may He bless you in your home life too, is—and will ever be—through life my prayer!" Sir Lionel pressed the hand in his, and then he passed through first the study door, then the front door, out into the night.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### SUNLIGHT.

AND so as April drew to a close Walter Beresford returned to Misterton. He had left his mark there on his first visit, and many a heart in farmhouse and cottage was only too glad to welcome him amongst them. He took up his quarters—bachelor quarters which had been got ready for him—at the Rectory, but he lived mainly at the cottage with us. How proud and pleased my father and I were to welcome him! To think that he was the new Rector! It seemed almost too good to be true. A phrase people use, perhaps, too lightly when we think of the wondrous mercies of our lives. I think my father was as proud of him as I was, although, of course, he would not confess it. How thin and ill he looked! How thoroughly his face seemed to tell the tale of what he had passed through! How thankful was he and were we at every sign of returned strength and power!

And so Walter walked again through the little village, and climbed the hill and passed under the shadow of the church—time-honoured fane of many generations—and then through the Rectory gates, through which he had passed for the first time not a year ago. And there was the tennis lawn and the conservatory,

and beyond the walk the ivied tree and the brow of the hill from which he had watched the sun set—oh! those many years ago, and yet not a year. Every step seemed to remind him of Lilian. That was the tree, she had told him, from the boughs of which she used to swing when a child. There was the conservatory, and the flowers and the ferns—her flowers and ferns—that she used to tend in dainty fashion every morning of her life. There was the garden seat where they had sat together. Had she forgotten him? Had the presence of her great sorrow blotted out his memory from her mind—from her heart? Had his long, strange silence made her doubt him? No, he felt in that bright sunshine, in that sweet Spring air, as the May blossoms and laburnums and the lilacs come out early this year to welcome him—flung their fragrance round him—he felt that they were meant for one another; he knew he could trust her, even during that long weariness of separation and silence—trust her to believe in him still.

And Lilian, did she hope still? Did she believe still? The winter had been a time of bitter trial and loneliness, but with the Spring her mother seemed to be returning to something of her old self. She went more out of doors, took more interest in Lilian and her household affairs. She had been won back from the despondency of her great grief by her daughter's gentle, considerate, loving care; and for the first time she had begun to consider how terrible a time of trial it must have been to Lilian too. And so it came about that mother and daughter were drawn back again slowly and by degrees to the

old relationship between them, only that the love was, if possible, deeper for the separation that had gone before.

It was evening in the month of May—bright, sunny, joyous, leafy, carolling May. The country is looking bright, and fresh, and joyous. The birds are having a fine time of it. Nature is putting on, nay, has almost donned, her fresh suit of greenery. But it is not with the country that we have to do, but with a small house in a side street in London.

It is late evening. The blinds are down and the curtains drawn; a small fire—more for cheerfulness than anything else—is blazing merrily in the grate. A young girl is sitting working quietly by herself on a sofa at the farther corner of the room, dressed in deep black, but with a relief of white at the throat and wrists. How sweet she looks! Nature has indeed been lavish with her, and time is, day by day, adding to her beauty. She drops her work; a deep dreaminess comes over her eyes. Is she "in maiden meditation, fancy free"? Nay, I think not; I think she looks—I cannot tell—I think she looks as if she were thinking of some one. Hark! is that not a cab which draws up either at this door or at the next? It is hard to tell which. Lilian listens. Visitors are of rare occurrence, especially at night. Yes, it is at their own door, for there is a ring at their bell. Perhaps it is a mistake—some one come to the wrong house. The servant opens the door. Lilian rises to her feet, for some one is being shown into the room in which she is alone. It is a gentleman. Is there dimness before her eyes? Or is it he?

No words pass between them—both hearts are too full for words. Only two steps across the room, one look—long, lingering look into each other's face—and then Walter Beresford takes her into his arms and to his heart, for joy, for sorrow, for shadow, for sunlight—for life and death!

THE END.

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